

EXPLORING THE LIVED PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF ELITE
NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE (NFL) PLAYERS

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By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my wife, Dr. Starla Ivey, you have given me encouragement and inspiration, even when it might appear as though I didn't need it, and when it definitely looked like I needed it. I am eternally grateful to have you by my side. You give me the drive to work even harder to be a positive example for our family.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychosocial experiences of elite NFL players. Many athletes dreamed and prepared to make it to the NFL as a starter, and to participate in the Pro Bowl or Super Bowl. Only a very few succeed. For these athletes, their process of preparation and performance delivery, has worked. This study was interested in exploring what were the key factors beyond talent and beyond physical/technical training that impacted their achieving success, and becoming a starter and making it to the Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl. What was it that these athletes thought or did, at the Point of Attack, when the ball was snapped?

Three elite NFL professional football players participated in this qualitative study with a narrative research design. The narratives collected from the three players provided rich and intimate personal stories related to each of their lived experiences.

Specifically, the intent of this study was to explore the personal experiences of these athletes, their thoughts, motivations, and intentions, at the Point of Attack, when the ball was snapped, to begin each play. The study also sought to identify evidence in the athletes' lived experiences that reflected the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Flourish (PERMA) model. This study also

explored the importance of team chemistry as an influence in these athletes' experience.

But, the primary focus of the study was what was happening in their psychosocial experience at the Point of Attack. And, what was found was profound. These athletes reported their thinking at the moment, at the Point of Attack, was "It's all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back!" Foundations and backgrounds for these understandings were uncovered. Implications for coach's education and field application were presented.

There was substantial evidence from the athletes' reports and multiple described experiences that would represent the key components of SDT: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. There were several instances that would represent the key components of Flourish through the PERMA model (**P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**chievement). Also, reported and described were multiple experiences that would represent the importance of team chemistry achieved through team cohesion and team environment. These athletes reported, "It's all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back!"

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A large portion of American society is fascinated with the sport of Football. People love all levels of football. From Pop Warner (little league), high school, college, and professional, football is a way of life. When football season arrives it often creates an energy that is unparalleled. The sport of football brings people from all walks of life together. Often, football influences the scheduling of weddings, funerals, graduations, and other major events. Football is a sport filled with passion. For many, this passion creates an infatuation with all that surrounds the game of football. National Football League (NFL) football is the highest level of American-style football played in the world.

The NFL's popularity continues to expand and access to the sport of football has evolved. The media coverage including radio, internet, television, print, etc. has continued to grow. According to the Los Angeles Times, in 2012, 24 of the 25 most viewed television shows were football games. The 2012 NFL Record and Fact Book reported that Super Bowl XLV on February 6, 2011 drew 162,900,000 viewers which was the most-watched television show in history. Super Bowl XVI drew a rating of 49.1 (73% of the share of the network) which ranked as the number one most televised sports event of all-time.

Overall attendance has been at all-time highs. In 2011, average attendance was 67,419, according to 2012 NFL Record and Fact Book. This placed the NFL at the top in average attendance of sporting events. In addition, people from many cultures in the world identify with the game, players, coaches, and excitement that surround it. Because of the growing interest worldwide, the NFL conducts regular season games overseas called the NFL International Series. These games have been played in Mexico City, Mexico and the United Kingdom. In 1994, in Mexico City, Mexico, the largest single-game attendance record was set at 112,376, according to the 2012 NFL Record and Fact Book.

With growing fan interest and media coverage, the players are better compensated for their fame. According to USA Today and the Associated Press (2012), the average salary in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 was \$79,000, \$356,000, \$1.1 Million, and \$1.9 Million, respectively. Reaching the pinnacle to become an NFL player takes a lot of sacrifice, hard work and dedication. The preparation to become an NFL player begins at an early age.

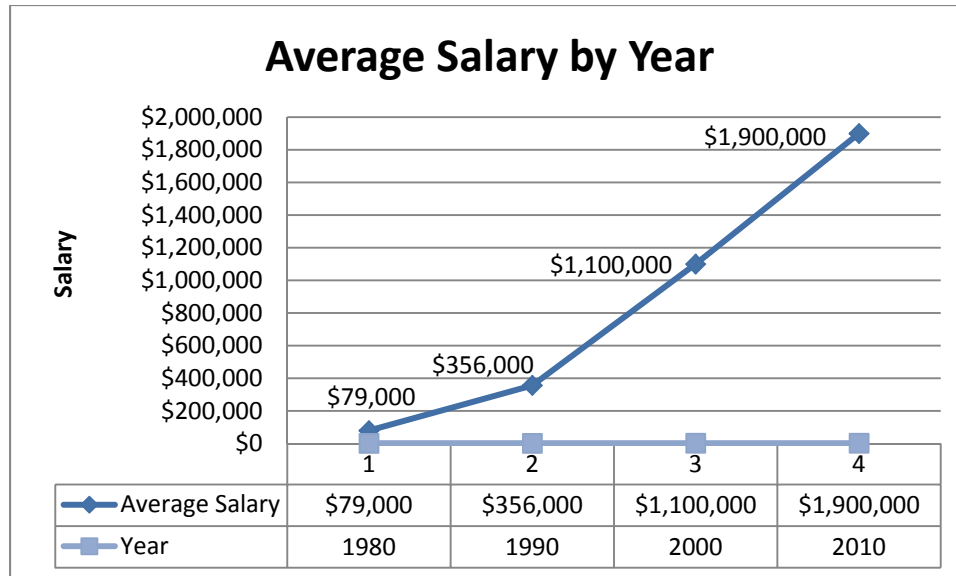


Figure 1 - Average Salary per Player by Year

In order to be successful in the NFL, extensive practice hours are necessary to develop essential skills. According to discussions with many NFL players, the average NFL football player dedicates 50-60 hours a week perfecting their craft. Many hours are dedicated in the weight room and training facility to become the best mentally and physically conditioned athlete. Hours upon hours of watching video to master fundamentals and schemes are accumulated. Going to school or practice early and staying late is expected of those aspiring to be great. Sacrifices are made to allow for practice and games. To be great, these athletes have to be highly skilled, conditioned, and motivated.

Across the United States, hundreds of thousands of young boys begin to play youth football (PopWarner.com, 2013). For many, their

dreams are filled with hopes of playing in high school or college, and for some, even in the NFL. Consequently, only a few hundred ever make it onto an NFL roster, and only a very few of those athletes ever achieve the status of being elite. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, there are approximately 1.1 million youths that play high school football. Of those who play in high school, approximately 77,000 go on to play in college. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) reports 69,643 college football players while the remaining are from National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Of the 77,000, only 300 to 350 will be invited to the NFL Combine and 310 will make it to the NFL Draft per year (Robbins, Goodale, Kuzmits, & Adams, 2012).

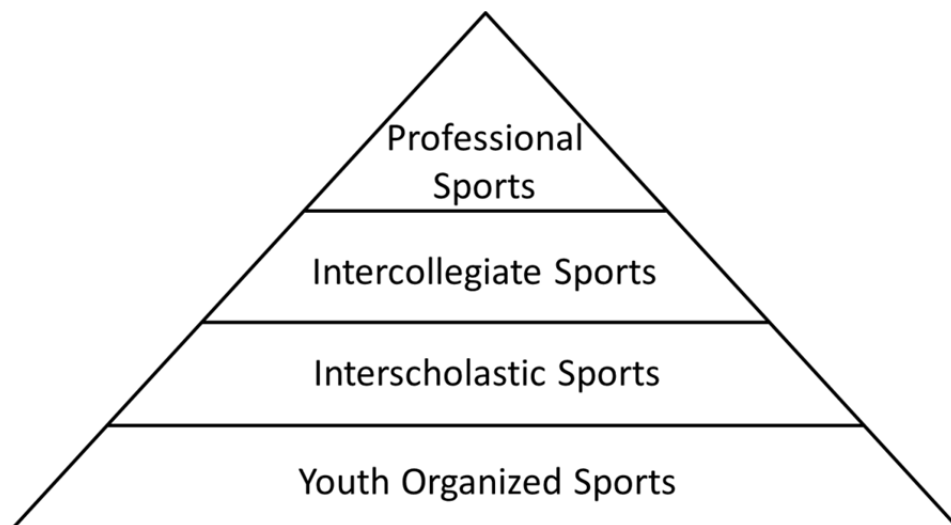


Figure 2 - Athletic Performance Pyramid

Out of nearly a million little leaguers, only a few hundred will compete in the NFL, as a Pro Bowler, Super Bowl participant, or regular season starter. These players are the elite football players in the world. For them, their process of preparation and game day performance has worked. They are the best of the best. What is it about these individuals, beyond their physical and technical training, that has allowed them to succeed?

Extensive studies have been performed on elite athletes (Bundzen, Korotkov, Korotkova, Mukhin, & Priyatkin, 2005; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001; McCann, 2008; Taylor, Gould, & Rolo, 2008; Ungerleider & Golding, 1991). Furthermore, much of the research on elite athletes comes from the Olympic Games and the sport of Track and Field.

Very little research has been done on elite football players. Existing research on NFL players has focused on psychological and physical characteristics of current and prospective NFL players. There has also been research on NFL Combine performance that identified measurable components of potential draft picks (Adams & Kuzmits, 2008a, 2008b; Bangsbo, Mohr, Poulsen, Perez-Gomez, & Krusturup, 2006; Hartman, 2011; Sierer, Battaglini, Mihalik, Shields, & Tomasini, 2008).

There has also been research conducted with NFL players regarding medical issues such as concussions, heart disease, and depression (McGee & Burkett, 2003; Omalu, Bailes, Hammers, & Fitzsimmons, 2010; Omalu, Hamilton, Kamboh, DeKosky, & Bailes, 2010; Robbins, 2011). None of these studies have focused on the individual player's understanding of their psychosocial experience, at the Point of Attack, during a football play.

The players' perspectives have never been captured in a way that tells how becoming elite happens in their life experience. Past research has not explored the players' perspective of their process in becoming an elite athlete. No one has ever sought to gain this information or the story directly from the football players. There is a gap in the literature relative to the experience of elite football players preparing to compete on game day.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite NFL football players on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. This research is important because currently no one has yet researched the psychosocial aspects of the most elite NFL football players or sought evidences of what they were thinking and experiencing at the moment at the Point of Attack. The study sought to understand what it is about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical

skills that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day? This study aimed to understand the lived psychosocial experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants and starters in the NFL. These are the very best NFL players who have prepared for and competed at the highest level. There is no evidence that suggests research has been conducted on their lived experience, to analyze this aspect of elite level NFL football players (Ogilvie, Greene, & Baillie, 1997).

Research questions to be considered include:

1. What do these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football is snapped to begin a play that allows them to perform at such a high level, consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?
2. In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?
3. What in the players' lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?
4. Did team chemistry and environment play a role in attaining success?

Previous research on NFL football players has suggested many topics such as concussions, depression, anthropometric data, NFL

Combine results, etc. None has sought understanding through direct report from the players' story of their lived experience. This research will allow the people who excelled in the NFL to tell their story.

Ultimately, it is the long term objective of this study to provide coaches and athletes with better education leading to better game day performance and positive lived experience.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite National Football League (NFL) football players on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. The study sought to understand what it is about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills; that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day? This study aimed to understand the lived psychosocial experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants and starters in the NFL. These are the very best NFL players, who have prepared for and competed at the highest level.

This literature review considered the research that currently existed, regarding the NFL and its players. It then reviewed research regarding the psychosocial characteristics and skills associated with elite athletes in other sports including Olympic athletes. From the sport psychology and positive psychology literature this review highlights three key components from the literature that supports the effective delivery of high performance excellence, including the impact of team chemistry and team environment.

However, there is no literature that focuses on their thoughts and actions, at the Point of Attack, during the play. The Point of Attack

is the moment during the play when a football player is expected to execute his assignment. This is the gap in the literature that this study seeks to address.

NFL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH

Much of the previous work on American football has focused on the formative years of football as a mass spectator sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Nauright, 1996). The recent research that has been done has focused on psychological and physical characteristics, medical issues and most recently concussions and measurable performances at the annual NFL combine for evaluating prospective players (McGee & Burkett, 2003; Omalu, Bailes, et al., 2010; Omalu, Hamilton, et al., 2010; Robbins, 2011).

Psychological Characteristics

There have been studies conducted with the National Football League (NFL) attempting to analyze psychological characteristics. Packman (2008) utilized the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) to examine the psychological characteristics that were associated with performance with NFL players. Additionally, the CPI was analyzed for utility in predicting outcomes in the NFL. This study did not show any significant statistical support for the use of the CPI to predict performance. Kauss (1978) looked at psychological readiness to

perform. Responses were analyzed and identified in 5 dimensions: experience, amount of playing time, sub-team, position, and self-reported professional hopes. Dotter (2010) studied social deviance with NFL players.

NFL Combine

The NFL Scouting Combine is a week-long showcase occurring every February at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana, where college football players perform physical and mental tests in front of National Football League Coaches, General Managers, and Scouts (Robbins et al., 2012). With increasing interest in the NFL Draft, the scouting combine has grown in scope and significance, allowing personnel directors to evaluate upcoming prospects in a standardized setting. Its origins have evolved from the National, BLESTO, and Quadra Scouting organizations in 1977 to the media event it has become today. Athletes attend by invitation only for 5 days to participate in drills, exercises, interviews, aptitude tests, and physical exams. Implications of one's performance during the combine can affect perception, draft status, salary, and ultimately career.

There is evidence that combine results predict draft status; however, there is no evidence that this predicts success in the NFL (Hartman, 2011). The Wonderlic Cognitive Ability Test formerly known as the Wonderlic Personnel Test (WPT) is administered to all potential

drafttees. The Wonderlic is a popular group intelligence test used to assess the aptitude of prospective draft picks for learning and problem-solving. Adams and Kuzmits (2008b) studied the relationship between the WPT and subsequent NFL success. The WPT is a measure of cognitive ability that is used by the NFL in their annual combine, a pre-draft assessment of player mental and physical skills. However, given that other psychological constructs (for example; aggression, leadership, ability to be taught easily, 'coach-ability', and self-confidence) have shown a relationship with athletic success, it seems beneficial for the NFL to consider expanding their mental assessments at the combine to include higher level cognitive measurements and also to examine the current research on peak performance that may provide for potential improvements in the NFL player selection process (Adams & Kuzmits, 2008b). Using correlation analysis, no consistent statistical relationship has been found between combine tests and professional football performance, with the exception of sprint tests for running backs. A better system of evaluation talent should be created to predict future success (Adams & Kuzmits, 2008a).

Physical Characteristics

Researchers have also analyzed other factors to see if there is any relation to predicting success. MacDonald, D. J., Cheung, M., Cote, J., & Abernethy, B. (2009) conducted a study that analyzed factors

that contributed to an athlete becoming an elite athlete. This study looked at relative age as a factor for success. The research found Running Backs, Tight Ends, and Defensive Linemen positions are most heavily affected by the relative age effect. These positions are believed to need more time to develop through physical maturation.

Cheung (2005) also, in the same study, researched population size of the community in which players are born and raised, as a predictor for success. It was found that players born in cities with a population between 50,000 and 99,999 are more likely to become NFL players when compared with those born in cities of different sizes. It is not known why populations between 50,000 and 99,000 are more likely to produce an NFL player.

There are prototypical measurements and performance numbers. Some studies have looked at the difference between positions on the field. Kraemer et al. (2005) conducted a study to present a profile of body size and composition of NFL players prior to the start of the regular season. The study found certain body types are better suited for certain positions on a football team. This information can be useful to coaches and athletes as there are many positions on a football team.

Some General Managers, Scouts, and Coaches prefer other methods to evaluate talent. They prefer to watch in person or study

video. Qualitative evidence in combination, with quantitative measures, is a better method for evaluating talent. Lyons, Hoffman, Michel, and Williams (2011) conducted a study that investigated the criterion-related validity of past performance and physical ability tests over time in a physically demanding context, the NFL. Results suggested that an indicator of past performance, collegiate performance, engendered a stronger relationship with future NFL performance than a variety of physical ability tests administered during the NFL Combine (Lyons et al., 2011).

In summary, research on the NFL and NFL players has primarily focused on physical and psychological characteristics, the NFL combine and medical issues. Many of the findings analyze prediction of draft status. The research on psychological characteristics and medical issues primarily analyze what is wrong with the players, such as depression, concussions, declining health, etc. There is no research that has looked at what it takes, to be successful in the NFL.

There are no studies that look at elite NFL players and how they are able to deliver their best on game day which is when it matters most. None of these studies have focused on the football players' lived psychosocial experience, on their thoughts and actions at the Point of Attack. The players' perspective has never been captured in a way that tells how becoming elite happens. No studies have ever looked at

current elite NFL football players, and what is going on in their thoughts and experience, that allows them to perform the best among the very best, during the play, at the Point of Attack. Again, this is the gap in the literature.

Elites

Many studies have been done on elite athletes (Bundzen et al., 2005; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; Gould et al., 2001; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Haberl, 2012; McCann, 2008; McGuire & Balague, 1993; Taylor et al., 2008; Ungerleider & Golding, 1991; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000).

Track and Field Olympic Athletes are the elite of the elite. They became elite because they performed better than everyone else when it mattered most. Numerous researchers have studied Olympic athletes. Orlick and Partington (1988) focused on Olympic athletes' readiness for competition, physical readiness, and technical readiness as they prepared for the Olympics. To support these, they identified that successful athletes evidenced total commitment towards pursuing excellence; quality training including regular competition and simulation training; and quality mental preparation for including a competition focus plan, and a plan for dealing with distractions.

Orlick and Partington (1988) found that major performance blocks interfered with high level performance included changing

patterns that worked and an inability to refocus in the face of distraction. Major factors perceived to have positively influenced performance in Olympic competition included mental skills and preparation, attitude towards the Olympics, support services and support facilitation, multifaceted preparation, physical preparation, and coaching (Greenleaf et al., 2001).

Collectively, these studies supported the important role of mental preparation, mental skills, mental control and emotional control, ability to focus and refocus, as requisite to achieving mental readiness. This consensus suggested the early preparation, and development of the psychosocial understandings, skills, perspectives, characteristics, and approaches, that are necessary, for supporting an elite Olympic athlete's successful performance. Olympic athletes have to train to be the best. They have to explore every possible opportunity to improve. Mental practice at this level is just as important as physical practice. Haberl (2012) suggest that the essential challenge for the Olympic athlete is...“can the athlete put their mind where it needs to be to perform at the games?”

In summary, there is a clear consensus from the research of these experts in applying sport psychology at the highest levels including the Olympics. They have consistently reported that to perform successfully in the Olympic arena, athletes must be skilled at

employing a high degree of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-reliance, and resiliency. They suggest the need for early education, preparation, and development of mental skills training in practice and competition. (Balague, 2012; Gordin, 2012; Haberl, 2012; McCann, 2008; McGuire, 2012; McGuire & Balague, 1993; Nideffer, 1989; Portenga, Aoyagi, & Statler, 2012; Vernacchia & Henschen, 2008).

These studies above primarily focused on athletes from individual sports, involving both male and female, with little or no physical contact. NFL professional football is different from those sports above. Football is an all-male, combative, and team sport.

The players in this study have achieved high performance excellence in the NFL. This research study explored the elite football players' reports of their experiences, as they lived them, with intention of uncovering and understanding of what they were experiencing at the Point of Attack.

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

This research study explored the players' reports and experiences as they lived them. The players have achieved high performance excellence in the NFL. The players have stepped up to the challenge of the NFL and have literally flourished. Positive psychology's concept of Flourish (Seligman, 2011a) and Self-

Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) are two of the most established and recognized frameworks of understanding success.

This guided the researcher in hearing and interpreting the story being captured.

In the SDT research, (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1995, 2000) established empirical evidence that identified three basic human needs: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The term autonomy literally refers to regulation by the self (Deci & Ryan, 2006), which means the individual being allowed to make meaningful decisions for oneself, about oneself, by oneself. Research in SDT has focused on the social-contextual conditions that facilitate versus debilitate the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development, specifically motivation, self-regulation, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT focuses on types, rather than just the amount of motivation, paying particular attention to autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation as predictors of performance, relational, and well-being outcomes. Research has shown that environments optimize people's development, performance, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 1995).

Human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. Accordingly, research guided by SDT

has focused on the social–contextual conditions that facilitate versus forestall the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development. Specifically, factors have been examined that enhance versus undermine intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

“SDT also addresses the social conditions that enhance versus diminish these types of motivation, proposing and finding that the degrees to which basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported versus thwarted affect both the type and strength of motivation.” SDT also examines people’s life goals or aspirations, showing differential relations of intrinsic versus extrinsic life goals to performance and psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Jõesaar, Hein, and Hagger (2012) demonstrated, the value of perceived autonomy support from the coach and task-involving peer motivational climate in predicting athletes’ intrinsic motivation over a training year.

The satisfaction of the need for competence emerged as the most important predictor of psychological and physical well-being. The findings suggest that particular aspects of the social environment may be salient for fostering particular psychological needs. The results also underline the importance of perceived competence for the

psychological and physical welfare of adolescents in team sports (Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004).

Flow has also been linked to self-determination. Flow is the optimal mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully engaged, composed, controlled, and in the moment and associated with peak performance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Kowal and Fortier (1999) study examined the relationships between different types of situational motivation and flow and situational motivational determinants (perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and the experience of flow. Results indicated that situational self-determined forms of motivation (intrinsic motivation and self-determined extrinsic motivation) and perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were positively related to flow, whereas amotivation was negatively related to flow. SDT and flow connects to positive psychology in terms of the healthy psychological development and well-being that we find within Seligman's theory of (Seligman, 2011a, 2011b).

FLOURISH

To flourish is to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that suggests goodness, growth, and resilience (Seligman, 2011b). This definition builds on path-breaking work that

measures mental health in positive terms rather than by the absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002). Seligman (2011a) identifies flourishing by using the PERMA model. PERMA is what people are experiencing in their life when everything is working. Seligman states that flourishing is the opposite of apathy. Seligman identifies the critical components contributing to the flourish experience as **P**ositive Emotions, **E**ngagement, Positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**chievement. PERMA is used to measure well-being.

Positive Psychology focuses on well-being. The goal of positive psychology is to build enabling conditions to flourish. Hope, wisdom, creativity, future mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance, are the focus of positive psychology. As a main effect, positive psychologists will learn how to build the qualities that help individuals and communities, not just to endure and survive, but also to flourish (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000).

The findings also has important implications for theories of well-being, suggesting that people seeking greater wellbeing would be well advised to focus on the pursuit of (a) goals involving growth, connection, and contribution rather than goals involving money, beauty, and popularity and (b) goals that are interesting and personally important to them rather than goals they feel forced or pressured to pursue (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004).

The athlete who is flourishing understands who they are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it. The flourishing athlete is aware of the conditions within them and surrounding them. Self-awareness then, is a component allowing an athlete to flourish and to deliver their very best performance at the highest level.

For the NFL players participating in this study, there is the inference they are self-determined and have flourished in their lives to become elite. This research sought to understand specifically what were the critical moments, what impacted their self-determination, and what led to them flourishing.

Additionally, this research study sought to uncover understanding of how the athletes learned or prepared their self-awareness skills and gained knowledge about the factors that could influence their performance. This research study also sought to connect the NFL lived experience to the general foundation of positive psychology.

Positive coaching is grounded in the philosophy of positive psychology. Good relationships are believed to be associated with positivity. Coaches could aim to foster an environment that considers the perspective of the athlete, provides positive competence feedback, as well as affording choice and decision making on behalf of the athlete (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Mack et al., 2011). Coaches

have a vital role in providing an environment that fosters self-determination and flourishing effecting team chemistry (McGuire, 2012). A positive coaching style provides the chance for autonomous decision making. This allows for personal growth in athletes (McGuire, 2012).

TEAM CHEMISTRY

TEAMWORK

Coming together is a beginning;

Keeping together is progress;

Working together is success.

-Henry Ford

Research suggests that positive environments characterized by a deliberate pattern of coach–athlete interaction may be associated with youth sport settings producing more satisfied and successful athletes (David & Granito, 1988; Hausenblas & Caron, 1996; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006; Westre & Weiss, 1991).

A significant moderate to large relationship was found between cohesion and performance (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002). Core components to consider in building a successful team include having a shared vision and unity of purpose, collaborative and synergistic teamwork, individual and mutual accountability, an identity as a team, a positive team culture and cohesive group atmosphere. Open and

honest communication processes, peer helping and social support, and trust at all levels are also important (Yukelson, 1997).

Portenga (2004) found a positive relationship between performance and team environment. He looked at critical conditions regarding athlete satisfaction and performance. There were five satisfaction themes found to be significant. Those were performance, leader, team, organization, and individual. The coach is responsible for creating the environment. "If the coach creates an environment where the athletes are satisfied and learn, then the athletes will continue to participate" (Portenga, 2004).

Team cohesion research says relationships between coaches and athletes have an impact on performance. A positive team environment is found to have positive impact on the athletes and their performance.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

In summary, the NFL is the most viewed sport in the world. Previous research has suggested many topics about the NFL experience, but no one has heard it from the voice of the athletes to hear how the athletes view and understand their lives. This study sought to understand the influence and impact of specific deliberate practice and preparations for delivering optimal performance through focus, sense of self, core values and beliefs, motivation and

commitment, and sense of autonomy. This research allowed the people who excelled in the NFL to tell their story.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Across the United States, hundreds of thousands of young boys begin to play youth football. For many, their dreams are filled with hopes of playing in high school or college, and for some, or even someday playing in the NFL. But only a few hundred ever make it onto an NFL roster every year, and only a very few of those athletes ever achieved the status of being elite. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, there are approximately 1.1 million kids that play high school football. Of those who play in high school, approximately 77,000 play in college. The NCAA reports 69,643 college football players and the remaining are NAIA. Of the 77,000, only 310 will make it to the NFL Draft. The purpose of the study is to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite National Football League (NFL) football players on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations.

In this study an "Elite" NFL player is defined as a Pro Bowl participant, Super Bowl starter, or regular season starter (see Appendix).

The purpose of this narrative design was to explore the psychosocial experience of elite NFL players. Many athletes dreamed and prepared to make it to the NFL and participate in the Pro Bowl,

Super Bowl, or become a starter. Only a very few succeed at becoming a starter and achieving great success in the NFL. For these athletes, their process of preparation and performance delivery worked. This study was interested in determining, what were the key factors, beyond talent, and beyond physical/technical training; that impacted their achieving success and making it to the Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl or becoming a regular season starter? What is it that these athletes think or do at the Point of Attack, when the ball is snapped, that makes them different?

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

A Qualitative study using a narrative design, with an interpretivist thematic approach, was utilized. Denzin and Lincoln (2000; in Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 138) describe qualitative research as a "situated activity locates the observer in the world, and involves a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. It engages in the process of making sense of and interpreting experiences in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to engage the subjects on a personal level. Questions can be formed to illicit the story of the players' lived experience. These questions allow stories to

be told to help us better understand human behavior. When people's behaviors are better understood it helps to understand life on a more complex level. Streat (1998) writes in regards to qualitative research, "Indeed, it can illuminate the previously unknown or tenuously known, provide familiarity through rich description, and explode faulty understandings." Bogdan and Biklen (1998) write, "Qualitative methods assume everyone has a story to tell." This assumption allows the researcher to become involved with the story. Through qualitative research, the researcher has the ability to search for meaning.

A narrative methodical approach was best suited for this research because the subjects are high profile elite athletes with an enormous amount of intense coverage by the media. Narrative method allowed the researcher let the subject to choose the setting that was comfortable to them such as location, time, level of privacy, etc. As a result, for self-preservation, they have become very skilled at answering questions diplomatically; often times giving the interviewer more of what they feel the interviewer wants to hear rather than what the player is actually experiencing. As a result, the subjects may have had an array of pre-programmed responses that provided a protective shield from anyone delving into the depths of their experience in which this study was interested. However, the narrative approach facilitated by the development of a trusting relationship with the researcher

allowed them to feel in control of what they shared. Feeling safe and secure with the researcher, the player may have become more willing to reveal the intricate and significant aspects of their experience of which this study was trying to uncover. Rapport was previously established as the researcher had a pre-existing relationship with the players in this study through a performance coach/ player relationship.

The intimate essence of what is in these athletes that allows them to rise above their competitors during competition was explored. Narrative analysis is a method where stories can be told and analyzed and will help the subject's dig deep. Narrative analysis allowed for the subjects to share, using their own words, how they were able to succeed. Using the narrative approach allowed the researcher to assist the subject to tell their story. "The goal of understanding how the person thinks is at the center of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998)". The approach was open-ended, which allowed for personal stories to be shared freely. These stories provided better understanding of their lives.

The narrative design was employed because new challenges face NFL players and there remains research to be conducted with "Elite" NFL players and Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants. Investigating into a level of understanding of the NFL players' lived experience adds to the body of literature, and will assist coaches to prepare prospects to

become future NFL Pro Bowlers/ Super Bowlers and regular season starters.

The role of the researcher became one of a narrator. In order to get to depths of the origin of issues there needs to be an opportunity. Using a narrative approach allowed the researcher to capture the essence as the story unfolds. Wolcott (2009) writes, "How you first became involved in the topic to how you proceeded, and what you learned, might be an appropriate vehicle for narrating your account?" The researcher had to maintain focus on the research and not him. Indeed, telling stories is neither a choice nor an obligation, since to live is to enact a story about the kind of person that each individual takes themselves to be (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

Participants

This study involved six participating subjects. The participants were purposefully selected. Criteria included being a starter or selected to the Pro Bowl or participating as a starter in the Super Bowl; played collegiately at a large Division I Midwestern university; and accepted the invitation to participate. Seven current NFL players meeting these criteria were asked and six to participated in this study. All six of these males that participated were African-American. The age range for these participants was 22-27. These men all played during the 2012 NFL football season.

Interview Protocol

Thinking Right, Positive Self-Talk, Optimal Arousal, Concentration, and Confidence are all concepts found within the sport psychology literature and positive psychology literature which support affective delivery of high performance excellence. These include skills and can be used from the “Whistle to the Snap” in preparation for the upcoming snap and play (Aoyagi & Poczwardowski, 2012; McGuire, 2012). “Whistle to the snap” is period that occurs when the referee blows the whistle to end a play and before the ball is snapped to start the next. This is the period that is known as the “whistle to the snap.” However, the players in this study became elite because of what they did between the “snap to the whistle”, at the point of attack during the play. These players make exceptional plays during critical moments are found during a football game. These players are identified by football coaches as “Playmakers”. It happens between the “snap to the whistle.” This is the essential focus of this study, what these players did during the play at the Point of Attack. This understanding guided the researcher in conducting the interview.

Interview protocols and analyses were guided by theories in sports psychology and positive psychology. “What were your greatest challenges and your response? What was your greatest challenge

leading to becoming a starter or Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participant and how did you respond? What happened while this was going on?

Procedures

A qualitative narrative inquiry was utilized to methodically collect, analyze, and code the data. Individual interviews were employed as the primary form of data collection, consistent with the narrative approach.

To protect the privacy of the participants the following processes took place: First, the interviews were conducted in a quiet, private setting, free from distractions. Second, the data collected was reviewed with the athlete to best assure that what was recorded was accurate relative to what the athlete was attempting to share and convey. This protected the accuracy of the themes gleaned from the interview. Third, each athlete was allowed to delete or change any information which they had concern regarding its inclusion in the study and report.

Face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect all of the data from the participants. Follow up questions were asked under specific circumstances such as missed information, oversimplified responses, or when a new concept emerges. Interviews were audio recorded using two devices. The interviews were completed by

September 1, 2013. This study also employed an informed consent process.

THE RESEARCHER

As the researcher, I helped to construct the narrative. In human sciences it is understood that, "the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation" (Neander & Skott, 2006). Creswell (2012) writes, "How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All researchers shape the writing that emerges and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings."

I am an African American male who has participated in the National Football League (NFL) as a football player. I currently work with Division I student-athletes in the role of Associate Athletics Director for Athletic Performance. I serve in the role of Athletic Performance Coach. I also train NFL players during their off-season. I have a personal vested interest in the success of these three elite NFL athletes. The more players I have coached in college who go on to play professionally reflects positively on my ability as a performance coach. Because of this position I am in, I have to be aware to not let my personal interest interfere with my obligations as a researcher.

As an elite former NFL player and as a male, I had many of the same experiences as the participants in this study. These experiences could create bias for me as a researcher. For those reasons, I engaged in reflexive journaling so that I could bracket my values, emotions, and personal perspectives during the process as the researcher. I also used member checking and an auditor to do independent coding.

My lenses of analysis included understanding of the elite athlete, autonomous and intrinsic motivation, and my being a strong proponent for the professional football player. I have a passion for understanding the team chemistry and its effect on the experience of an athlete. For this reason, I have studied team cohesion and team environment to gain better clarity about the narratives that develop, both as they are revealed. Analysis was conducted by using this as a lens. There may have been bias on my part due to the fact that I played in the NFL. Although, I did not make it to elite status, I have extensive knowledge about what it takes to be successful in the NFL. I currently communicate and interact with NFL players which may have influenced my research.

Trustworthiness

Morrow (2005) suggests research should be grounded in a theory. There are criteria for trustworthiness in interpretivist research. Fairness, authenticities, and meaning are components of paradigm-

specific and transcendent criteria. "I see quality or validity in qualitative research as paradigm bound to a certain extent; that is, there are particular standards of trustworthiness that emerge from and are most congruent with particular paradigms" (Morrow, 2005). The individuals in this study had their own thoughts about the reality they have lived. It was my job, as the researcher, to assist the subjects to reach down and bring to the surface their story. Member checking was used to further establish trustworthiness. The use of a peer debriefing research team and an auditor were used for triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

I anticipated minimal, if any, risks or discomforts for the participants. I asked the participants to share their preparations and perspectives regarding their experiences leading to and playing in the NFL. By their very nature, these experiences with the National Football League preparation and competition were very intense, with extreme personal identification and personal investment. Pseudonyms were created to protect these players anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

The informed consent process emphasized the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study, as well as the voluntary nature of the study. The participants had the right to refuse to answer any unwanted questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were given a written Letter of Consent, and the

investigator reviewed with the participants in case questions arose. Participants signed a copy of the Letter of Consent, and kept one for their reference.

The information shared in the interviews was personal and sensitive. Thus, there were potential emotional risks in discussing their challenges and obstacles, which they faced in their NFL experience. If emotional distress occurred, a licensed counseling sport psychologist was available for them to meet with.

Something different about this research study was the participants are considered to be the very best. They have reached the pinnacle of performance in the sport of American Football. While they were participating in this study, they will serve as a model for future understanding. Current and future personnel, coaches and athletes will gain a better understanding what it is to be the best. Any information they wished to be kept private was be deleted from the interview immediately upon their review and request.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite NFL football players on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. The study sought to understand what was it about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills that allowed them to deliver

superior performance on game day? This study aimed to understand the lived psycho-social experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants and regular season starters. These are the very best NFL players who have prepared for and competed at the highest level.

1. What did these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football is snapped to begin a play that allows them to perform at such a high level, consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?

2. In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?

3. What in the players' lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflected the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?

4. Did team chemistry and environment play a role in attaining success?

To operationalize my efforts to answer my research questions, a semi-structured open-ended interview design was employed. "The goal of understanding how the person thinks is at the center of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998)." The approach was open-ended to allow for personal stories to be shared freely. These stories provide better understanding of their lives.

Interview questions

1. What made you successful (Research Question (RQ) #3)?
2. How did you adjust (RQ#1)?
3. Did adversity play a role in your success (RQ#1)?
4. How did you handle adversity (RQ#1)?
5. What makes you different (RQ#3)?
6. How important is football to you (RQ#2)?
7. What motivates you (RQ#2)?
8. What drives you every day (RQ#2)?
9. How do you approach practice (RQ#1)?
10. How do you approach game day (RQ#1)?
11. How did your coaches affect your success (RQ#4)?
12. How did your teammates affect you and your success (RQ#4)?
13. Describe your ideal mindset of game day (RQ#1)?
14. How did your failures affect you (RQ#2)?

The interview schedule was a guide for the researcher. The questions were general and non-directive, encouraging the athlete to tell their story. The researcher, who conducted the interviews, was highly skilled at facilitating conversation. This assisted in allowing the narratives to form naturally.

DATA ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis is a way that different stories can be told and analyzed. Studies by (Andrews, Mason, & Silk, 2005; Smith & Sparkes, 2009) demonstrate and reveal the importance of narratives and understanding sports research. Narrative research allows the researcher to explore the depths in the gathering of “thick and rich” data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). There is also a three-dimensional space within the narrative inquiry model that allows the researcher to look backward and forward, look inward and outward, and establishes the experience within space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002; Creswell, 2012).

After the data was collected, the analysis of the narrative study took an approach developed by Yussen and Ozcan (1997) that analyzes the data for five key elements - This analysis takes the shape of a plot structure including characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution (Creswell, 2012).

The analytic abstract allowed for the following highlights: “The process in the individual’s life, the different theories that relate to life experiences and the unique and general features of the life experience” (Creswell, 2012). The theories referred to in this study are Self-Determination Theory, Flourish, and Team Cohesion. I developed a consistent, systematic method to best manage the data, reading, memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, and analyzing the

narratives, as each narrative took its shape. The Data Analysis for Narrative Design is outlined by (Creswell, 2012).

Chapter 4 highlights excerpts and quotes from nine hours of interviews that were transcribed into one-hundred and fifty pages of text. In this presentation of the findings, a format for reporting.

The data with analysis and representation as outlined for narrative took place in the following steps. Data was managed as I created and organized each individual interview into a file. Included in that individual file was the recorded interview, the transcripts from the interview as well as notes I took immediately after the interview. The research journal, within this file, includes notes to me, about my thought process, and note taking throughout the process of the data analysis, with reflexivity. Next, reading and memoing began with a general read through of the transcripts while also listening to the audio of the interview to make sure everything was correct on the transcripts.

I employed the use of a transcriber with all six interviews, where pseudonyms were used for all participants. Once I received the interviews back from the transcriber, I proofread all six transcriptions to make corrections. After proofreading the transcriptions, I selected three of the six participants based on follow-up availability to analyze. One of the three participants was not available for follow-up because

he was no longer on an active roster during the 2013 season. The other two were not available because of suffering season ending injuries during the 2013 pre-season.

After selecting the three remaining stories, I began writing notes in the margins forming initial codes. Following the initial codes I then described the story and set of experiences and placed them in chronologically. I then sought comments from an auditor, who coded the interviews, provided cross-case, and with-in case analysis.

I then reordered the research question to 1,4,2,3 and separated the excerpts by research question. Then I added introduction statements using themes from codes and added summary sentences after each quote. I repeated for all athletes and organized all athletes under each research question. A table was then created for each athlete by context, lived experience, and theme. Next, I created a chart for each research question that summarized each research question followed by a summary of the findings.

The next step was to combine themes by athlete and cross validate with my research partners and tie within and cross-case emerging themes back to the previous research. The narratives provided the ability to focus on the process, theories, with features of the lived experience. Finally, I was able to interpret the larger meaning of the story with a general theme (Creswell, 2012).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

Previous research has suggested many topics, but none has sought understanding through direct report from the players' story, of their lived experience, that allowed them to deliver excellent performance, consistently, on game day. This research allowed these three players, who excelled in the NFL, to tell their story.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite National Football League (NFL) football players on game day during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. The study sought to understand what it was about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills, that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day. This study aimed to understand the lived psychosocial experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants or regular season starters in the NFL. These were the very best NFL players who have prepared for and competed at the highest level.

Three elite NFL professional football players participated in the study and provided the opportunity to be interviewed. The narratives collected from these three elite football players provided a rich and intimate personal story related to each of their lived experiences. These stories generated an enormous amount of information and detail. To best present their stories in relation to the research questions that have defined the study, a format was chosen that was organized around the elements of the four research questions, context, and the themes that emerged from the players' reported lived

experiences. Direct excerpts from the athlete's narratives that reflected each research question was provided.

The research questions formed the foundation for the framework used to examine these athletes. The four research questions were as follows:

1. What did these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football was snapped to begin a play that allowed them to perform at such a high level, consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?

2. In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?

3. What in the players' lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL was consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?

4. How did team chemistry and environment play a role in attaining success?

The primary interest of the study was embodied in the focus of research question 1. What was it about these athletes that happened at the Point of Attack, when the play began and unfolded, that allowed them to consistently perform at the very highest level, and to be then considered to be among the greatest players at their positions? To

promote a logical sequence for understanding their lived experiences, the findings for Point of Attack and Team Chemistry are presented first. Finally, the evidence of Self-Determination Theory and the Flourish PERMA model conclude the findings.

Each athlete's story is presented within a chronological context, from their youth through the college and to the professional level. Excerpts have been taken from their narratives, with explanatory comments added and themes identified. Tables have been created to more clearly identify context, lived experience and themes for each athlete relative to each research question. Each section concludes with a chart reporting specific key quotes from each athlete that reflected the elements of the research question being considered.

One of the advantages of narrative design is that using a human-centered approach provides a context for capturing life stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The focus of narrative inquiry is on exploring complexities from a human-centered perspective, providing the most suitable framework when looking for lessons from life experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative has usefulness in exploratory story, where participants just being able to tell their story, allows for the uncovering of unique gems.

This study explored elite NFL players at the Point of Attack. In that exploration, this narrative has uncovered a real 'nugget of gold' in

terms of information and understanding in the spontaneous response of the three participants. Because of the profound impact that this reported experience could potentially have for the preparations and experiences of future sport participants, this report will start off with the big finding. This is what was reported from the intimate experiences of these three elite NFL players.

The three athletes in this study provided somewhat of a surprise when they each spontaneously reported an unexpected glimpse of their own personal mindset at the moment of the snap of the ball at the Point of Attack. They reported:

“I play for the name on my back!”

“I want my family name to mean something!”

“I want to be remembered!”

“Your name means a lot!”

“I work hard for my name!”

“I named my son after me for a reason. I play for my son.”

“When you say my name, you say elite. I want my name to mean a lot!”

“...I walk into the locker room and see my name on my jersey in my locker, I get emotional.”

The primary research question asked about the Point of Attack was “what were defining challenges and deliberate practices and how did the athletes respond?” A cross-case analysis of the three athletes’ narratives and psychosocial impact at the Point of Attack is identified for each in chart 1. Each athlete’s response to research question 1 was collected and suggests these players play for the name on their back.

The following chart provides a summation of the findings collected from all three athletes illustrating they play for the name on their back.

Walter, Alan, and Stan’s: Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations		
Theory/ Framework	Emerging Themes	“So What” Factor
SDT/ PERMA	Socio-economic struggle/ Adversity	“I play for the name on my back!”
PERMA	Leaving a legacy/ Family name	
Team Environment	Leadership	
SDT/ Intrinsic motivation	Work ethic/ Hard work	

Chart 1 – Cross-Case analysis with excerpts reflecting the main emerging theme

This chart illustrates and enlightens the importance of the name on the back of each of these players’ jerseys. At the Point of Attack, these players have overcome numerous defining challenges and deliberate preparations. All three athletes experienced tough socio-economic struggles and adversity in their family. They each developed a tenacious work ethic and became good leaders. All three of these

athletes had a strong desire to leave a legacy and elevate the status of their family name. All three of these athletes say, in their own version, "I play for the name on my back!"

These comments come from great elite athletes! The very best of the best! Great players, known for being great teammates, on great teams! And yet, each of these reports sound like the very selfishness coaches are seeking to eradicate within the team. Is this possible? How can this be? The reports of "I play for the name on my back!" and "It's all about me right now!" could very well be the most profound and potentially impacting findings in this study.

The report of the findings that continue below, provide evidence of where this perspective was developed, and how it is portrayed within the lived experiences of these athletes, during the game at the Point of Attack.

At the Point of Attack, each of these players knew they wanted to, and had to, make the play. They knew that it "If it is to be, it is up to me." This is another saying that is common in football culture. Elite players often embrace this way of thinking. They may thrive on it. For example Walter shared that he says to himself, "You are not going to run me over", and "you are not going to catch this ball on me", or "I will make the play" and Alan said, "I play for the name on my back."

"I play for the name on my back."

“There is no I in TEAM”

“There is no ‘I’ in Team” and “Big Team, Little Me” are sayings thousands of coaches use to promote the concept and importance of team and to discourage selfishness. Coaches teach that selfishness is thinking only about you and putting yourself above the team. Coaches also preach about accountability to the team. One of the main premises of accountability is: that to be accountable, players have to do their jobs, whatever they are expected to do. This requires players to focus on themselves and their task and then doing it well. They have to deliver the desired performance to the best of their capability. When everyone does their job well, the team will be successful. This presents a contradiction where athletes are told that the success of their individual performance and the success of the team are both more important than the other.

The importance of “self” in the process of delivering excellence has been lost. If players are being taught the team is bigger than they are, it sends a subliminal message that they are small, unimportant, and just cogs in the bigger system. If they are small, they don’t matter. If they don’t matter, their contributions to the team are insignificant. And, if their contributions are insignificant, how or why should they be accountable? Why do they need to be accountable?

Some coaches also regularly use another phrase to discourage selfishness that says, "You play for the name on the front of your jersey, not the name on your back." This demands from each individual that they play for their team or their school, but not for themselves. The use of these types of clichés by coaches sends the message to players that they do not matter, just the team matters. Again, thinking of yourself is selfish and hurts the mission of the team.

All three of these athletes had a strong desire to leave a legacy and elevate the status of their family name. All three of these athletes say in their own version "I play for the name on my back!" Next, the findings will be presented on the Point of Attack, defining challenges, and deliberate practice.

POINT OF ATTACK, DEFINING CHALLENGES, AND DELIBERATE PRACTICE

Point of Attack is defined by the moment leading to the snap of the football, and the demand to deliver the greatest possible performance, to contribute to and best assure the team's success at each opportunity to perform. It can be described as doing the job or responsibility of the task at hand above and beyond the standard. Deliberate preparations include all preparatory activities that are performed with the intent to improve for the purpose of delivering great performance when it matters. Deliberate preparations include, but are not limited to practice, video study, walk-throughs, strength and conditioning training, meetings, rehabilitation, visualization, etc. Defining challenges are life events that can stop, change, alter, or accelerate progress. All of these aspects are critical to the elite football player and performance as they operate at a high level, consistently.

What do these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football is snapped to begin a play that allows them to perform at such a high level consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?

Walter

“Practice; every day it’s your job, you know. There are no off days in the NFL. Practice; just like game days.”

Walter: Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Family economic struggles	Defining challenges
High School	Talent	Deliberate preparations
	Adversity	Defining challenges
Professional	Work ethic	Deliberate preparations
	Respect	Deliberate preparations
	Investment	Deliberate preparations
	Elite	Point of Attack
	Practice	Deliberate preparations/ Point of Attack
	Emotion	Point of Attack
	Handling failure	Defining challenges

Table 1 - Walter’s lived experiences reflecting Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations

Before High School

Walter experienced tough family challenges while growing up. He experienced adversity that would serve as motivation to want more out of life.

Interviewer: So, what drove you to be successful?

Walter: *“I really think my personal struggles in life and not having much and those things forced me...”*

Walter experienced humbled beginnings which put him in position where he wants more out of life.

Interviewer: Tell me more about those situations.

Walter: "Growing up in a single parent home. My town was low poverty. Drugs were involved in my home, etc., seeing those things coming up as a teenager..."

Walter grew up in a low socio-economic environment. He grew up in a single parent home that was surrounded by drugs and violence.

Interviewer: You talked about humility and being humble. What makes you humble? What makes you have humility?

Walter: "Not having anything coming up. I think all those struggles and coming up in poverty and seeing a lot. My granny humbled me a lot. Like I said, not having nothing probably was the best thing that happened to me; it was a gift and a curse. The curse was not having nothing: the gift was not having nothing. You know, I know how to go without."

Walter grew up in a poor community and was raised by his grandmother. He values his early life lessons of not having many material goods and believes it taught him humility. These life lessons were defining challenges in his life.

High School

Walter was committed to be successful. After spending a year in the Juvenile Detention Center, Walter committed to being successful in his life. He believed football was his only chance to make it. He knew he had the talent. He just needed to develop his work ethic.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what made you successful?

Walter: "Hard work, dedication, past situations that have forced me to be greater. Because, I knew basically, that was my only shot, so I had to take advantage of them."

Walter attributes his success to past situations and hard work.

He believes playing football was his way to a better life.

Interviewer: Take me from when you started playing football until now.

Walter: "Football wasn't my sport coming up. It was basketball. I really always thought I was a basketball player and a baseball player. It was basically one of those situations where I went out there, and I think talent got me far enough to get recognized as far as, you know, went out there playing football and I was just like one of the fastest kids, catching the ball everywhere. But uh, he was the one who was basically like, 'Alright let's go, you got talent, you need to be out here', and he knew my situation at home."

Walter, thought growing up, basketball and baseball would be what he was best at. His high school coach recognized his ability and convinced him to really try hard in the sport of football.

Walter: "I had went to division youth services for a year; you know that's basically a juvenile detention center and what not. Being there the whole time; I think about like it was yesterday."

Walter spent a year in a Juvenile Detention Center where he spent a lot of time reflecting on his life. This was a defining challenge in Walter's life.

Professional

Walter talks about the similarities between sports and life.

Sports taught him that you can't cheat and get to where you want to be. Walter believes to get where you want to be, you have to work for it, especially when no one else is looking. He has a very serious and deliberate approach to practice. Walter wants to be one of the best safeties to ever play the game of football. He talks about one of the players he admires most and wants to be remembered in the same way. Walter was invited to the Pro Bowl in Hawaii. This was an emotional experience. He actually had a broken hand at the time but was not going to let that stop him from playing in the Pro Bowl. Walter also uses his past failed attempts as motivation.

Interviewer: You talked about hard work and dedication? Help me to understand what you mean by that?

Walter: "Hard work and dedication. It's self-explanatory. You know, you can't cheat this game of football. You can't cheat sports, period. Sport is so much like life, that people I don't think sometimes understand it. It's so like it teaches you the biggest life lessons. You can't cheat. What you put in is what you get out. I heard that in high school and I didn't understand it then. But now that I'm 27 years old, I look back like, it's what you put in is what you get out, you know. That hard work you put in, you know, as far as when no one is looking. I literally walk inside of a gym on my own, like, nighttime, seriously, I've lifted on my own when, you know, nobody seriously, I've did push-ups, sit ups, ran, and people don't understand, like, those small things. It's not because you want to stay in shape. It's the stuff you don't see on the football field that gets you where you are at. And

you know I'm from a small town in the Midwest. To understand how you go from, you know, being passed up (Walter named #) picks in the draft to being a pro bowl defensive back. And, you know, I'm a man, humble here today, but when I got over there to Hawaii, man, it was one of the best feelings. You know what I'm saying? That means you're one of the elite safeties in the field. And then, you know, come from a small town in the Midwest, and climb my way up to where I'm at, nothing but hard work and dedication."

Walter talks about his experience at the Pro Bowl and being recognized as one the elite safeties in the NFL and what a great feeling it was.

Interviewer: Tell me about the Pro Bowl?

Walter: "It was easy man, when I got the invite, I'd rather went to the Super Bowl you know that, but, yeah, when I got that invite man I went home and I almost shed tears. Like I said, it goes back to all the hard work you put in, and, I actually had a broken hand at the time. And you know; my NFL team wasn't sure that they wanted to clear me to go over there and play. And, so I'm like whoa, I'm in Hawaii getting interceptions in a pro bowl. You know, this little kid from a small Mid-Western town I always think like that, man, I remain humble. I think things like that, you know, gets me this far. "

Walter played exceptionally well in the Pro Bowl.

Interviewer: You mentioned the word 'elite', what does that mean to you?

Walter: "One of the best, one of the best at what you do. And, defensive back is a tough position. And, you know, you look back at some of the best safeties that played the game, you know. I watched film on those guys seriously. I YouTube videos of Brian Dawkins before I even got on the field, and he was an elite defensive back; you know. Until his last day

in Denver, you know, he just, he grinded it out. And, everybody that talked to them in that film had nothing but great things to say about this dude. And, I never met him a day in my life, and it feel like I know him. You know what I'm saying? So that's the type of elite status I want to be in when I'm done. I want to be elite, like one of the best that played the position. When you say defensive back and hitting people and getting picks, I want you to say, (Walter) was good at that. ELITE, I want to be one of the best! "

Walter talks about the desire to be elite. He wants to be associated with the best. Walter wants to redefine the defensive back position by raising the standard of what it takes to be the best.

Interviewer: Take me through your preparations for practice.

Walter: "Practice. Every day it's your job, you know. There are no off days in the NFL. Practice; just like game days. People don't even know that, preparations, practice, might go so hard, sometimes I, look, I'm not going to say slow myself down, but remember its practice. I practice just like I play, man. If you ask the coaches, I don't go out there jogging around, I work there. It might look stupid when I'm doing it. Like, spin moves on a blitz? It might look like I'm joking around then when you get to the game on Sunday. I'm doing the same spin move. I practice just like I play."

Walter talks about his perception of practice. He believes he plays like he practices and he practices just like he plays. Walter uses deliberate practice to maximize his time on the practice field.

Interviewer: Take me through your preparation on game day. Define game day for me?

Walter: "It's crazy, because, in NFL, you got 16 weeks. It's amazing how week 1 is exactly the same as week 16, as far as preparation. You know, you would think

you'd get to game 14, and be like, man, this has been a long season, man. But seriously, you're walking with your headphones on, well I do, I walk, you know, with my headphones on, with the same moves. Like, you have to bring it today, its game 15 of the season. You done already made the playoffs, or you didn't, you know. It's still the same way. It's grind time; you know. Like I said, I sit in my locker, I shed tears every game now that I'm present in this city. It seems like everything comes over me, I don't know if it's the Red Bulls or what, but it seems like everything just come over me game day. And, I just basically, just let it all out. I love playing on that field, let everything out."

Walter takes the same approach on game day no matter what the circumstances. He approaches each day with integrity and love for the game of football. He is emotionally present on game day. Walter uses all of his past experiences as motivation and lets it all out on game day.

Interviewer: What are you letting out – describe that?

Walter: "All the pain, and all the, all the pain, and all the hard work that you put in, you know. Like I said, when I talk to myself in my helmet, I cry sometimes in my helmet. That's why I just call my helmet my own sanctuary church. When I put that helmet on, I always say, 'you don't know what I'm doing'. I cry; I do everything. I'm in like, I'm one emotional guy but I probably don't show it all the time. That's how I know when I'm under the helmet, don't nobody see me but me. You know what I'm saying. You can't see what's going on behind that visor. That's where I play, man. I get real emotional and just leave it all out there."

Walter describes the emotion he is letting out on game day.

Putting on his helmet is a spiritual moment for him. Walter does not

let everyone see his emotions, and chooses to control and guard them so he can deliver great performances.

Interviewer: Is there anything I haven't covered that you think has been part of your success?

Walter: "How do you take failure? How do you adapt to failure? Because, I mean, I think that's a huge thing. And me personally, I have failed a lot in my life, you know. From, you know, going to that center as a juvenile. I have failed a lot you know. The best thing about it is, I bounce back; you know what I'm saying? And I'm one of those types of people who can taste a championship, but never got it. You know, from being in high school getting to the state championship, lost. Here at my University, being one game from the national championship and we lost. One game away from the Super Bowl in the NFL, lost. Those failures right there, I think basically, building me up to see a great day."

Walter talks about the importance of past failures on his success.

He talks about being resilient to set-backs and adversity.

Alan

“I went out there and played; I played on a broken leg got the interception, ran back, got tackled, like at the 20 yard line.”

Alan: Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Family socio-economic struggles	Defining challenges
	Injury	Defining challenges/ Point of Attack
High School	Injury	Defining challenges/ Point of Attack
	Family moving	Defining challenges
College	Injury	Defining challenges/ Point of Attack
	Big game	Defining challenges/ Point of Attack
Professional	Practice	Deliberate practice
	Video study	Deliberate practice
	Self-confidence	Deliberate practice
	Self-mastery	Deliberate practice
	Locker room mindset	Deliberate practice
	Future Hall of Famer advice	Point of Attack

Table 2 - Alan's lived experiences reflecting Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations

Before High School

Alan grew up in a low socio-economic environment. He developed a strong desire to succeed and have nice material things. Walter suffered an ankle injury while in the fifth grade. He waited and did not play football again until he was a junior in high school.

Interviewer: Looking back, dig in to that.

Alan: *“About how, just what separates me from other people?”*

Interviewer: Think back to what you're describing? Where did that come from?

Alan: *“(Laugh) when I was a kid? It's definitely a kid thing. You know, I grew up, in like, I think, not having stuff, you know, really just growing up poor. I'm saying it was like dirt poor, like rats and stuff like*

that, I mean we had mice and stuff like that. But seeing like the people that really have things. I think it's really just seeing the potential of little things that you can do to get somewhere else. To get, you see the other side of things."

Alan noticed other people that had nice material things which made him want to work hard to have nice things as well.

Interviewer: You're a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity and if so what and describe it and how it affects you?

Alan: *"From the beginning I've played football or when?"*

Interviewer: Just go back.

Alan: *"My first pair of cleats was some rubber Payton Manning cleats. Rubber bottoms, (laugh) I'll never forget it, they were terrible, like. And, I'm trying to run and make moves and I twist my ankle like the second day of practice. And, I think I'm young, I'm like I'll say like 5th grade, didn't play football again until I was like a junior in high school."*

Alan had an inexpensive pair of cleats and suffered an ankle injury because of the lack of structural support. When this happened he chose not to play football again until his junior year in high school.

High School

Alan moved while he was in high school. Before he moved, he attended a school with a very good football team, with a good player that started in front of him. He eventually moved and ended up playing at a school that was not very good and there he ended up starting. While playing a rival school his junior year, another member of the opposing team took a cheap shot and broke Alan's leg.

Interviewer: You're a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity, and if so, what, and describe it and how it affects you?

Alan: *"From the beginning I've played football or when?"*

Interviewer: Just go back.

Alan: *"I played when I lived in Illinois before I moved to Iowa where I graduated from. I played with this school called WHS, and they were really good at the time. They were definitely ranked in the state, like in the top five, really good. I didn't play for real. I definitely didn't play varsity. The guy in front of me ended up going to ISSU and played. So I didn't play I moved to Iowa and played. I broke my leg, my senior year. We played a rival school and dude hit me, dirty, dirty hit. Broke my leg; and I think that was adversity, because that was like the first time I got hurt playing football. And, I was, I didn't know what to do at the time. So, I healed back from that."*

Alan suffered a broken leg during a football game. This was a defining challenge in Alan's life.

College

Alan suffered another broken leg in a college game. He worked hard to rehabilitate his leg so that he would be ready for the biggest game of the season. Alan played exceptionally well in that biggest game of the season and believes that his leg was not fully healed but he played anyway.

Interviewer: You're a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity and if so what and describe it and how it affects you.

Alan: *"From the beginning I've played football or when?"*

Interviewer: Just go back.

Alan: *"Then I got to college, and I got to the third game of the season, I think. We played SDS, I broke my leg."*

Alan: *"This is gonna be a game that people like remember; like and I'll never forget that, because I was like, 'Ah sh*t', then I broke my leg."*

Alan suffered a broken leg in a college game. This was the second time Alan broke his leg. The first time was in high school. This was another defining challenge for him. Alan was more determined than ever to rehabilitate his leg and return back to playing football.

Alan: *"I went out there and played; I played on a broken leg got the interception, ran back; got tackled like at the 20 yard line. I'll never forget when I got tackled I kind of like looked up at the sky like, 'God, like whoa'. (Laugh) Like, damn man, this is some serious stuff. I think just going through that, that's been some adversity playing football. Yes (laugh)."*

Alan had a great performance in the biggest game of the season.

Professional

Alan does not see practice as practice. He sees it as competition, and uses every opportunity to get better. Alan works hard and believes that preparation breeds confidence. He has total confidence in his abilities. Alan has a great amount of respect for those who have played the game at a high level. He talks about advice he received from a future Hall of Famer.

Interviewer: Talk about practice.

Alan: *“(laugh) Practice. I don’t really look at it like practice. First off, I look at it like I’m competing. Like, I’m out here, like, like it’s a test, really, I mean. It’s not like a practice for me, like, because if it was a practice I’d go out there and do a bunch of reckless stuff and like I don’t look at it like practice, I’m like this is game, maybe 85, 87, like this is just another game. I mean we’re out here; because it’s not really practice. Everything is competing. Everything is; everything is to do it in a certain way. I mean, you might call it practice because you might repeat it again, but it’s really not practice. It’s like, go do this and do it, and if you can do it right, you might have to do it again. I mean, so it’s really, I think in NFL everything is recorded. So you get to learn everything, you get to see everything. From the way you ball your fist to the way you do a swim move. Everything is seen. So, if anything, practice, you learn from it and see little things. But, I don’t call it practice.”*

Alan views practice as competition. He values video study as a learning tool. Alan uses deliberate practice to improve his ability to deliver his best on game day.

Interviewer: How do you approach game day?

Alan: *“(laugh) I’m still learning, really. I mean, every time; this is all new for me. Like the whole, I’ve been playing football; I’m always trying to learn something new for me. I don’t know; a lot of music. Like, music is my therapy. So, as far as game day, I listen to a lot of different music. And, I try to like meditate, can’t do it. Try to sleep, can’t do it. Try to watch something, can’t do it. So, really just, I don’t know really. I don’t know, how I approach game day with, I don’t know – ready. Think of anything, locker room-wise, once I get to game day, in there, relaxed. I’m relaxed; yea, confident.”*

Alan is always trying to get better. He works hard and invests a lot into his preparation. On game day, once he reaches the locker room, he feels at ease and self-confident.

Interviewer: Where does being relaxed and confident come from?

*Alan: "I know nobody can f*ck with me. Like, I know, like, I try, I work, so that if I face myself, it's gonna be a hell of a fight. It's gonna be one of the craziest things ever. Like, if I faced me right now, I don't know, I don't know who's gonna win. So, when I come in the locker room, when I'm playing you, I don't even like, I don't see size, I don't see, I don't see, I might not see things differently, I see things differently. So, I might not see how. Like, I'm not; I'm relaxed because there's no reason for me to be nervous. I've faced so many obstacles in my life. I've been through so many things. That the thing, I should be scared of, I'm not scared of. If I'm supposed to be scared of 6 foot 8 tackles, 340 pounds, oh, cool, like. Have a good day; get out of my face. I approach things differently. I'm calm, I'm relaxed because there's nobody that can, there's no threat."*

Alan has a high level of confidence in him. He uses his past experiences as strength and motivation.

Interviewer: What's your ideal mind set just on game day. Are you, are you there? Are you, are you approaching it? Are you not there?

Alan: "Game day? Am I there? (Laugh) I don't know. In the locker room (laugh), I'm there. It depends. Really it depends, really depends, man. Like, once I'm on that field, I'm definitely in there. That day, I don't know, I could be. I know it's a game but I don't know. But being there's different. What do you consider being there?"

Alan is calm in the locker room. Once he gets on the field is when he turns it on.

Interviewer: Physically, mentally, and it's just and being present.

*Alan: "It's like I talked to Charles Haley a long time ago. When I first, when I first left college, I talked to Charles and. I never talked to this dude before in my life. Somebody was like, "I'll give him your number". Somebody's gonna give you a call. Charles was like (laugh) don't ever let a MotherF*cka put they hands on you! Don't ever let a MotherF*cka! And just, Charles is just hella, just really intense. He's like; prove your point. You let your sh*t be known REAL quick. He was just basically telling me like he approached it. Like, I mean I looked at Charles and the guys he was going against. And he was kind of a normal size, like my size going against, you know, back then; tackles hella really big, and just, whatever, and just little things like that. I mean I watch a lot of Mike Tyson, man, I watch a lot of Mike Tyson. If anything I do before a game I watch a lot of Mike Tyson. I got this clip. I'm about to show it to you, I got this clip and he's; it's his training and he's knocking dudes out. He's moving and the way he's moving. His whole like movement is like, like don't f*ck with me, man, I'm not that guy."*

Alan uses visualization techniques in the locker room to help himself get in the right mindset.

Alan suffered major injuries and used them as motivation to come back stronger. These injuries served as adversity, and this made Alan very determined to get healthy and become stronger. He has been through tough family socio-economic struggles. Most of his friends were older, and many times, he was not the most talented of

the group. He had strong desire to be recognized in the same light as those who were more talented in his neighborhood. He measured himself against the best because he wanted to be the best. However, he plays for something bigger than football. Alan tries to do things that will keep him remembered because he wants to leave a legacy. Having a son motivates him to be successful because he wants his son to be proud of his name.

Stan

“But, ultimately it’s just my situation growing up, my mom and dad; their, their marriage was on the rocks when I went to college.”

Stan: Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
High School	Displaced family	Defining challenge
	Learned from older brother’s mistakes	Defining challenge
College	Low NFL draft prediction	Defining challenge, Deliberate preparations
Professional	NFL Combine	Point of Attack, Defining challenge, Deliberate preparations
	Parental marriage trouble	Defining challenge
	NFL Pro Day	Point of Attack, Defining challenge, Deliberate preparations
	Dad and Drugs	Defining challenge

Table 3 - Stan’s lived experiences reflecting Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations

High School

Stan had two older brothers who were really good athletes but made some poor decisions while attending college. This had a profound impact on Stan. Stan was able to learn from his older brothers’ mistakes. Also, while in high school, Stan’s family was displaced by Hurricane Rita. This was a difficult time for him and his family. This event had an impact on his college recruiting. Many college coaches lost contact with Stan.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: “Like I had a chance to sit back and watch his mistakes and learn from them.”

Stan talks about how he learned from his older brother’s mistakes.

Stan: "And, you know me seeing that as well, and that was like, that was like it happened, like, right, it was perfect timing, I just got to high school. And, I always remember like people say your first year of high school is like the biggest year, like."

Stan talks about the impact of watching his older brother make some poor decisions.

College

Stan decided to return back to college after receiving a lower round draft prediction than he expected. He learned a lot about the draft process from one of his college roommates, which taught him to anticipate who would be high-round draft picks at his position.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "So any ways, I'm here at Mid-Western University thinking about leaving after that junior year. I'm like man, that's my best year, so I'm, I might, I might need to test these waters, so I put my name in the draft. Came back, it didn't come back how I wanted it to come back. They said like third round, I was like, 'are you kidding me?' I'm like, 'dang', I thought I just put in some work, and um. Then I, even the bowl game, the bowl game was on my birthday down there in um, the Alamo dome down at the Alamo Bowl. That was my birthday, so turned 21 that day. Roommates got the MVP's, me and Jackson. You know, that was pretty cool, so I thought, I thought my grade might come back higher, but it didn't; so I looked at the draft. Kind of heard some things from Jackson going through the process, his, hearing from his agents and people that's recruiting him and that the draft would be like this year. Linebacker heavy draft, that's like (Stan named other linebackers) was the number one backer in that draft, all those guys, I mean they, they were all coming out that year."

Stan and his college roommate were MVP's of the Bowl game. Afterwards he decided to test his draft status. There were other really good linebackers in that year's draft.

Professional

Stan continued to experience family troubles while being a professional. His parents were experiencing marital trouble while his dad battled addiction. Stan attended the NFL combine. He had Pro Day at his University following the NFL Combine. Stan had outstanding performances at both of these events. He reflects and talks about one of his high school teachers who doubted his ability to reach his goals of being a first-round draft pick.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "But um, ultimately it's just my situation growing up, my mom and dad, their, their marriage was on the rocks when I went to college. Dad battled with drugs and that doesn't go well with finances. And, you know finances is everything so, basically, like my dad would get paid and my mom would have to go pick up his check. She was the rock; she stuck with him a long time. Dad, he'd get right, fall back, so when I went to college; they ended up got a divorce. I didn't even know they were separated. And um, when I was here, they kind of just, I don't think they wanted me stressing out, me away from home. They see what my other brothers did when they went to school and they were just pulling for me, both of them, and they kept, they kept that from me. And um, so I was up here doing my thing and reach that plateau trying to reach. But, seeing them, seeing them battle over that; that made me want to be better, too. I knew if I worked hard, I'd be in a better position to help. So got to the NFL, put dad in

rehab, for real, for real. You know like, not up the street rehab in Houston or something. Took him out to San Diego, dropped him off, you know basically and, and dad's clean now, doing man awesome, awesome; doing good things."

Stan talks about his family's troubles as he was growing up. The adversity his family was faced with ultimately strengthened his internal desire to do things right and be successful.

Stan: "Combine was cool, didn't really enjoy that. But it was cool for what it was."

Stan talks about the NFL combine and the process it was. He made the most of his opportunity.

Stan: "It's like a meat market; so, ended up getting drafted. In a pretty good situation, came to the Hawks which was perfect, wanted to be with them; really had a good time, in those interviews, with Mr. Bluffe. He was actually in the interview, that's was kind of weird, um. He was the only owner that was in the interview. So, I thought, I thought that was dope too."

Stan talks about the NFL combine and the team interview process.

Stan: "Came back to Mid-Western University, had a good time during my pro day; all that stuff."

Stan talks about attending his Pro Day in college after he returned from the NFL Combine.

Stan: "Boom, so while I made it to my, my childhood dream to be an NFL player and be a first-round pick, and it was one time, back in 2005, no 2006, it was after I committed. After signing day or whatever, kind of like a big deal, only one that signed, like D1 that year. We had some guys sign JuCo, D1AA

whatever, and my, my broadcast teacher, so I told her yeah, I was like I'd be a 1st round draft pick, 2009, 2010 draft whatever. She's like really, 'Stan, she said how many people can say that and it can actually happen'."

Stan talks about his high school teacher who doubted his ability to achieve his dream of being a professional football player.

Stan grew up in a family where his last name was synonymous being a great athlete. All of his family members were very good athletes. His older brothers had made mistakes, and did not live up to the family name. So, he felt the need to take it upon himself to bring pride back to his family. He felt the need to restore the legacy of his family name. He has flourished in the NFL as a starter, and has even been voted a captain by his teammates. Game day is special to Stan. Stan's family legacy is important to him.

The following chart provides brief, cross-case analysis examples of direct comments, from each player illustrating their experience with Point of Attack, defining challenges, and deliberate preparations.

What do these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football is snapped to begin a play that allows them to perform at such a high level consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?	
Walter	<p>“When you say defensive back and hitting people and getting picks, I want you to say, Walter (last name) was good at that.” (p.56)</p> <p>“I work hard for my name.” (p.98)</p> <p>“You want your name to be mentioned with the elite class.” (p.97)</p> <p>“...my name means more than that. I named my son after me for a reason, because, you know, when I’m gone, and he will have to carry on. I want my name to mean something.” (p.97)</p> <p>“I want my name to mean a lot.” (p.95)</p>
Alan	<p>“I think, first off, your name means a lot, so every decision you make you gotta be responsible with it.” (p.128)</p> <p>“I try to do things that will keep me remembered.” (p.126)</p> <p>“I play for the name on my back.” (p.128)</p>
Stan	<p>“...what I want to do and hearing about where my name might fall in the draft.” (p.182)</p> <p>“I can’t say he (brother) embarrassed my family’s name you know, but I mean he didn’t live up to what he was supposed to.” (p.169)</p> <p>“The (Stan’s last name) in East Texas, I know you can’t put the names and stuff but. In east in southeast Texas, like, our name, like football, athletes in my family, It’s known that if you’re a (Stan’s last name) that you’re an athlete.” (p.133)</p>

Chart 2 – Cross-Case analysis with excerpts reflecting components of Point of Attack, Defining Challenges, and Deliberate Preparations

From chart 2 above, it is found that these players report they love their team and their teammates. These players are playing for something bigger than football (Tables 1, 2, and 3 above).

Walter, Alan, and Stan report they love their team and their teammates. These players are playing for something bigger than football. These player's say when they line up for a play, they have the mindset, "it's all about me right now!" and it's "my responsibility is to do what I do to the best of my ability to the best I can." These players talk about accountability. For them accountability means each player does his job to the best of his ability for the team so the team can be successful.

TEAM CHEMISTRY

Team chemistry will be viewed through the lenses of team environment and team cohesion. Team cohesion has shown to be important to the success of a team. A team environment that is positive is important to the athletes' success on that team. Both team cohesion and team environment are concepts that have been found to positively or negatively influence individualized or team performance.

How did team chemistry and environment play a role in attaining success?

Walter

“Family, man, family. I don’t, the word ‘team’, I guess that’s a sports word, but I look at it as family.”

Walter: Team Chemistry		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Coach/ player relationship	Team cohesion
College	Family	Team cohesion
	Teammates	Team cohesion
	Brothers	Team cohesion
Professional	Identity	Team cohesion
	Football battlefield	Team environment
	Soldier at war	Team environment
	Legacy	Team cohesion

Table 4 - Walter’s lived experiences reflecting Team Chemistry

Before High School

Walter had several coaches who impacted his development. One he spoke in high regards was his little league football coach. This coach served as a mentor and father figure to Walter.

Interviewer: Take me from when you started playing football until now.

Walter: *“Which one?”*

Interviewer: You talked about your coach in little league. Tell me about that. Tell me about whichever one you want to talk about.

Walter: *“So Coach was basically like, ‘what cha doing? You need to be out here?’ and this is peewee football I’m talking about. And uh, you know, rest in peace to my coach who just died recently this year. My peewee football coach was a huge mentor in my life, he just passed, you know.”*

Walter was approached by a little league football coach to try out for football. This coach came to mean a lot to Walter.

College

Walter had a college teammate pass away during an off-season workout. He reports this event had a deep impact on him and on his college teammates. He developed a bond with his teammates he would carry with him beyond college.

Interviewer: You mentioned football and you mentioned life. Tell me what those two words mean to you.

Walter: "Because, you know what I mean, if you look back, I'm talking about a former teammate now, when he passed, that was definitely a wake-up call. You know what I'm saying? This is the real deal."

Walter had a college teammate pass away during a summer training session. This experience caused him to take an introspective view of what he values in life.

Interviewer: What does the word 'teammate' mean to you?

Walter: "Family, man, family. I don't, the word team, I guess that's a sports word, but I look at it as family, man. If I'm in the locker room with you man, every day, like, you my brother, real talk, and that's just, that's just how it is. And, I get caught up in it sometimes. Cause, might be, we're brothers, you know, you get to fighting on the field, I'm fighting with you. That's just, that's just how it is. Especially losing my teammate, you know and stuff like that. Basically, it's real life, you know what I'm saying, so, when you in the locker room with guys for 5 years and stuff like that in college. These are your brothers. These guys you see every day aren't just friends. Ain't no friends and stuff like that. We family, you know. Tell me the difference that family, real brothers do that

we don't do. I mean we're real brothers, like, seriously."

For Walter, being part of a team means more than just being teammates. He sees the team as his family. Losing one of his college teammates caused him to see more value in life. He considers his teammates to be his brothers.

Professional

Walter considers his teammates to be his brothers and his family. Walter wants to be identified as a leader for his teammates. He considers the football field to be a battlefield and his teammates to be soldiers at war. Walter wants to be accountable to his teammates and seen as trustworthy.

Interviewer: What does football mean to you?

Walter: "Whew, I don't even know the words to even basically describe that, like. It sounds weird when I say it, and I always say it, I owe my life to football because I really don't know, I. When people ask me where would I be without football? I couldn't give you an answer, I really couldn't, because, I don't know. You know, I could sit up here and say I'd be a school teacher or a football coach, I mean, that's stuff I'd like to do, but I don't know where I'd be, you know what I'm saying. But um, football's done so much for me and my family, providing, got me a college education, then it opened up doors that, you know, I mean, I don't know what else could have opened these kind of doors up like this for me. Put me in a positive to provide for my future kids, my son now, nothing but positive, came out of hard work and dedication on the football field. Who would have known?"

Walter sees football as something that gave him direction in his life to be successful. He believes football has provided many past, current, and future opportunities for him and his family.

Interviewer: I've watched you on game day. Your teammates tend to gravitate toward you. Your teammates know where you are. What's going on there?

Walter: "You want to be known, you know, you want to be looked at as a leader on your team. You know what I'm saying? One of those guys they can follow. But at the same time, I'm sure, I know guys, everybody leave they all on the field. But, that's what I want everybody think about me, you know. You, when you go to war, I'm one of them guys. The soldiers you want to take out with you on the front line. I actually heard, I want to say, our quarterback say it. It just stuck with me ever since then. Because, I think quarterbacks were talking one day, joking around, '(Walter), you're crazy, but I'll definitely take your ass to war with me'. Like, he, you know when he said that, it just stuck with me and I was like (clap), that's how you want to be. You know, you want to be a guy somebody come to war, going to war with."

Walter wants to be known as a leader on his team. He wants to be respected for the way he approaches and plays the game.

Walter was deeply impacted by the passing of one of his college teammates. That incident left a deep and lasting impression on him.

Walter values teammates and views them as his brothers and the team as his family.

Alan

“So, teammate wise you gotta find out where you place with your teammates, you know, whether you have an effect on your teammates, whether they care what you’re saying.”

Alan: Team Chemistry		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
College	Excited to play	Team environment
Professional	Coaches are teachers	Team cohesion
	Teammates and brothers	Team environment
	Character and accountability	Team cohesion

Table 5 - Alan’s lived experiences reflecting Team Chemistry

College

Alan had many conversations with his college teammates. They talked about what they perceived as the biggest game on the schedule, and they were excited to play in it.

Interviewer: You’re a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity and if so what and describe it and how it affects you?

Alan: *“And we played UO that year, and UO was like. I remember like, I remember we found out about the schedule in the summer. It was like me, me and Jackson and Will. We play UO this year, it’s gonna be like, you know.”*

Alan: *“All this time, like this game, you know, everybody’s well preparing for it.”*

Alan and his college teammates were excited to play the highly ranked team.

Professional

Alan views coaches as teachers. He believes their role is to provide information necessary to know the game plan and discover

tips about the upcoming opponent. Alan believes in his own ability to prepare himself to play at his best. He considers his teammates to be his brothers. Alan believes that to be a good teammate and leader, he has to get to understand his teammates. He uses his teammates for accountability to bring his best, especially when he has a day where his motivation is not where he wants it to be.

Interviewer: Talk about two things, coaches and teammates. Talk about whatever you want to first.

Alan: "Huh, Okay, coaches are like, um, a teacher, a cheat sheet. You already know what it takes for you to do what your job. But they know what it takes for you to do it really good. Only a select few coaches can really coach. I think anybody can give directions and tell you how to do something, but very few can communicate with you in a way that you learn from it. So, I think that what I've learned from coaches. And I've been really blessed and fortunate to be around a lot of guys who know how to, like, teach you. Because, I mean, I got a lot of friends who play ball. They tell me how to get coached. What? Like, how? What? That doesn't even make sense. Like, but so I think just really on the coaching note, they're teachers, they're, it's like a, they cheat; it's a cheat sheet for me. I might not listen to everything you say, but you'll say something that, I mean, I may be like, alright I might try it out. Because, honestly, before coaches were involved, we were playing football. We were playing ball, like, we were, before like, you really, you were playing ball. They may have told you how to get low, but you were playing, you were doing what you were doing. So, I think as far as that, they're a cheat sheet."

Alan views coaches as teachers, and one of their main roles is to help with game preparation. He really values knowledgeable coaches

who have the ability to teach what they know. Alan believes the game is supposed to be fun and he plays the game that way with or without his coach's influence.

Alan: "So, teammate wise you gotta find out where you place with your teammates, you know, whether you have an effect on your teammates, whether they care what you're saying. Whether their minds even on teammates. Or, are they here for. I mean, you gotta figure out where everybody's at. And, but I think once you figure out your position on them. And I'm just speaking freely, not, not as if I'm the leader. I'm speaking like, if whatever it is, you gotta figure out where you play in. So, if you're the guy everybody looks up to, accept your role. Me speaking teammates wise, I'm younger."

Alan speaks about effective teams. He believes that he should learn about his teammates before he starts to act as the leader. Alan understands that in order for teams to have good chemistry they have to go through a process.

Alan: "Seriously, I mean, everybody's, because everybody comes from a different path though, so. I'm like, I know who I affect but I also know, like, if I need to get serious and let's really go out here and do this. Let's really go out there and prepare like this. They gonna listen. So you gotta understand, I think, you don't wanna be that teammate. (Laugh) I don't want to get into that."

Alan wants to be a leader on the team and realizes that not everyone has the same goals. He knows that in order to be a good leader you must get to know your teammates.

Interviewer: Have team environments, coaches, and teammates played a role in your success?

Alan: "Yes, probably. You know, you work out, you're running, and you're lifting and then you have your days when you don't feel like doing nothing, or you have your days, your bad days, really. Then you can count on your teammate. You know you see like your teammate, who's there like, you know. You're squatting, holding that bar up behind you, talking to you. Or, if you're, your sprinting you're gassed out or you're spent, and, you find out who's really; you really see people's true colors."

Alan knows that coaches and the team environment have had some impact on his success but he is not willing to give them too much credit. He knows who has helped him but he believes more in himself and his own ability to reach success.

Alan: "You can get double teamed. Who's doing their job better than they should be? Teammates, you gotta find that person and find out who it is."

Alan values teammates doing their job on the football field.

Alan views coaches as teachers, and really values their input with his preparation. He appreciates coaches that are good teachers. Alan's approach to leadership is to see where he fits in and provide what is needed at that moment. He respects his teammate's individuality and tries to tailor his approach to be the most effective.

Stan

“Trying to be the man, ‘Boy’, just made captain last year, voted by my teammates.”

Stan: Team Chemistry		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
High School	Good high school player	Team cohesion
College	Talent	Team environment
Professional	Recognition from teammates	Team environment

Table 6 - Stan’s lived experiences reflecting Team Chemistry

High School

Stan was a good high school player. He attended a small school in a southern state. This gave him the opportunity to play many positions on his team.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: “Played um, what my freshmen year actually, we did have a freshmen team. I come from a small; small schools like a 3A, in (Stan name his home state) they go up to 5A. So, it’s a small school where you play both ways. So, my freshman year, I was the emergency quarterback and we ran a spread, we ran a spread offense. I was the emergency quarterback but I played receiver too, so I played outside. And, all my boys we all played together played.”

Stan attended a small high school where they had to play both offense and defense.

College

Stan talks about the amount of talent in his recruiting class. He believes that it was a unique group of guys that enjoyed working hard and having fun.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

*Stan: "And, having the guys that I came in with. I think that's a special group of guys, like, I mean, not taking anything away from those other classes. But the '06 class was, I think, pretty cool, I don't think ya'll knew what you had when we came. I don't think, I mean really, like, people really knew that class was as talented as it was. You know? Jackson was obviously a stand out and I was like, 'Who is this dude?' Don't want to recruit my ass, I said I'll show them when I get there. I remember the first day we were out there Marcus Forest, like, shook me. I was like, 'Oh sh*t'. Everybody was like, 'Oh'. And, Jackson out there, catching all these balls; but, it was one play he was against me and I broke up the pass and I let him know. Cause, that's what I do, I always let people know. So um, ended up having a great time, you know playing with the guys – 7 on 7; getting kind of into the swing of things."*

Athlete enjoyed being around his college teammates.

Professional

Stan talks about being drafted by his professional team to help the team with leadership. He believes his team can get to the Super Bowl and win. He compares his professional team with his college team and the success he experienced.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "Trying to be the man, 'Boy', just made captain last year, voted by my teammates. That's pretty cool, that's damn good, my third year. Let's see, got my boy, Moe out there with me, which is awesome. Boy, it feels good, so great, so great (emotional)."

Stan was voted captain by his teammates. He talks about how good it feels to play with one of his college teammates.

Interviewer: Tell me about game day.

Stan: "They shouldn't have, I don't know, we gonna to do something. We gonna do something. Man I'm telling you. We've just been there a couple of years and they came and got me for that, I'm telling you. They came and got me for Moe. They knew, us together, it's gonna be ridiculous, and we getting the pieces we need. We're doing it the right way. We just make a step each year you know. It wouldn't surprise me; we get to Super Bowl next year, and lost. You know, we take the step, boom, boom, Boom! We ain't gonna lose it, but when we get there you know what I'm saying. You know, I'll be like, that's what happened my first year, boom, boom, boom, and playoffs. We had some winning seasons, Mike came here. It's kind of like this place here Chip, after Brian, they start winning and so I think we're doing some good things there. I look forward to my next game day."

Stan was voted a captain by his teammates. This is the ultimate form of respect from your peers.

Stan enjoys being around his teammates. In college, he became roommates with his teammates. His college teammates have all remained close after college. All of his college teammates are very successful in their lives, and this brings a great sense of pride to Stan.

The following chart provides brief, cross-case analysis examples of direct comments from each player illustrating their experience with team chemistry.

How did team chemistry and environment play a role in attaining success?	
Walter	<p>“My peewee football coach was a huge mentor in my life, he just passed, you know.” (p.75)</p> <p>“Family man, family. I don’t, the word team, I guess that’s a sports word, but I look at it as family man. If I’m in the locker room with you man, every day, like you my brother, real talk, and that’s just, that’s just how it is.” (p.76)</p> <p>“Tell me the difference that family, real brothers do that we don’t do. I mean we’re real brothers, like, seriously.” (p.76)</p>
Alan	<p>“Only a select few coaches can really coach. I think anybody can give directions and tell you how to do something, but very few can communicate with you in a way that you learn from it.” (p.80)</p> <p>“And I’ve been really blessed and fortunate to be around a lot of guys who know how to, like, teach you.” (p.80)</p> <p>“So, teammate wise, you gotta find out where you place with your teammates, you know, whether you have an effect on your teammates, whether they care what you’re saying.” (p.81)</p>
Stan	<p>“Trying to be the man, ‘Boy’, just made captain last year, voted by my teammates.” (p.84)</p> <p>“We just make a step each year you know. It wouldn’t surprise me; we get to Super Bowl next year...” (p.85)</p> <p>“Let’s see, got my boy, Moe out there with me, which is awesome. Boy, it feels good. So great, so great.” (p.84)</p>

Chart 3 - Cross-Case analysis with excerpts reflecting components of Team Chemistry

From Chart 3 above, it would appear that there is substantial evidence that the athletes reported and described multiple experiences that would represent the importance of team chemistry achieved

through team cohesion and team environment (Tables 4, 5, and 6 above).

The statement "I play for the name on my back" sounds selfish to many leaders in sport. In football, it is often taught that players play for the name on the front of the jersey, not the back. These players want to honor their teammates. They also report they feel accountable to their teammates, and they want their teammates to be accountable to them. These players are all about their team. These player's say when they line up for a play, they have the mindset; "It's all about me right now! And that is on me because no one is going to do it for me. I have to deliver the best I have right now." These players report they love their team and their teammates. They believe in team and team matters. And, the same time, they report that it is THEIR responsibility to bring their best every play. This is real accountability.

Walter, Alan, and Stan all shared they had experiences where there was evidence identification with the team, team environment, and people sharing for a common cause. Walter and Stan had many coaches in their lives who were an integral part of their personal growth process. Alan views coaches as being more assistive with preparation in the sport of football on game day. All three of these athletes acknowledge the importance of having good teammates

around them and the positive impact those teammates have had in their lives. When these players feel valued by their teammates, it adds to the value of the name on their backs.

SELF – DETERMINATION THEORY

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) theorizes when people take control of the things they can control in their own lived experience, they have enhanced motivation and effectiveness. For this control to happen, SDT further suggests, that when the lived experience includes relatedness, competence, and personal engagement, coupled with autonomous decision-making, intrinsic motivation is predominant which leads to enhanced personal effectiveness (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individual's needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence, are met. As intrinsic motivation is associated with greater perseverance and the continued pursuit of performance excellence, this theory suggests that the highest performing athletes are those that feel their role is valued on the team, that they are capable of performing their role well, and are able to engage in autonomous decision-making.

In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?

Walter

“...I’m one of them people, I’m a self-motivator. Nobody can motivate me more than myself.”

Walter: Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Self-talk	Intrinsic motivation
	Humbled beginnings	Relatedness
	Self-motivated	Intrinsic motivation/ Autonomy
	Strong work ethic	Competence
	Desire to be great	Intrinsic motivation
	Leaving a legacy	Relatedness
High School	Goal setting	Intrinsic motivation
	Work ethic	Competence/ Autonomy
	Recruiting	Autonomy
College	Work ethic	Competence/ Autonomy
Professional	Earning respect	Relatedness
	Self-talk	Intrinsic motivation
	Fighting spirit	Intrinsic motivation
	Pre-game	Competence/ Intrinsic motivation
	Material items	Intrinsic motivation
	Family name	Relatedness/ Intrinsic motivation
	Leadership	Relatedness
	Playmaker	Competence
	Motivation	Intrinsic motivation
	Mental toughness	Intrinsic motivation

Table 7 - Walter's lived experiences reflecting Self-Determination

Before High School

Walter grew up in the Midwest and came from a background of humbled beginnings. Walter came from a tough socio-economic family situation that provided many opportunities to overcome adversity.

From these early challenges, Walter learned he had the power to make

decisions that could improve his circumstances in life. Walter had a strong desire and fighting spirit to be great, and wanted more out of life. He wanted to leave a legacy where he would be remembered for doing something great.

Interviewer: So, what drove you to be successful?

Walter: "...basically put me in a position where I wanted better out of life. That is what forced me to be a better athlete and a better person."

Walter came from humbled beginnings. Not having much growing up gave him the desire to achieve more in life.

Interviewer: Tell me more about those situations.

Walter: "...it puts you in a position that you want to do better because you know where those types of things get you and they're not good. It just forced me to be a better man."

Walter talks about previous situations in which he grew up were not good situations. He felt he had no options other than to want to be a better man. In his awareness to make different choices he empowered himself to become a better man.

Interviewer: Did you mention something about something inside of you? Describe that.

Walter: "That last feeling you get when it gets tough, when things get tough. And I'm talking football right now because you know, it's that fourth quarter feeling where that last play on the line, you talking in your head, like I want to be the one that gets this play. And you want to be special, you want to, you know, when things get rough. That last rep you need on that 225 test. That's going through those personal struggles in life that's what gave me that last rep. I

feel like, I talk to myself a lot before the games, during the game, after the game. And you know, I'm one of them people, I'm a self-motivator. Nobody can motivate me more than myself. So that's what going through those things did for me. "

Walter talks about the feeling inside of him when he feels like his back is up against the wall. He feels the situation calls for determination and fighting spirit. Many of Walter's personal struggles led to self-determination and the fighting spirit to overcome adversity.

High School

Walter spent a year in a Juvenile Center for children. He used to talk to himself while he was alone. While he was in the Center, he set personal goals that would be accomplished through hard work and a desire to be competitive. He recognized that he had athletic ability and talent. Walter was recruited by a major Division 1 University to play football and earned a full tuition scholarship, which was an important part of the process to becoming great.

Interviewer: Take me from when you started playing football until now.

Walter: "I used to sit in my room and what not, and um, I knew what I wanted to do. I set goals while I was in that place for a whole eleven months. When I get out there I'm playing, I seriously said, 'I'm playing football'. Soon as I got out, I just, I just took it from there. I worked my tail off, and high school, I just worked my tail off and I never once thought about college, I'm honest. You know, I'm an honest guy, I always say I never once thought about college. I just was the type that when I start something I never quit and I wanted to be the best at it, and I don't

want to be just another guy on the field. And so, you know when Mid-Western State started calling, you know, and you getting letters and stuff like that. And I always, you know, I followed Mid-Western State, way back, Mid-Western State basketball, seriously. When Mid-Western State sent that letter, I was like. I was one of the earliest commits. If you look back, I was one of the earliest commits. That was a blessing, man, to get that scholarship. The rest is history after that, I just wanted to, you know, be great."

Walter spent a year in a Juvenile Center for children. This was a time he used to self-reflect, be honest with himself, and set positive goals. He decided that he would commit to working hard and earned a college scholarship.

College

Following his college career, Walter was selected in the second round of the NFL draft. There were several safeties chosen before him and this was upsetting to his pride. Walter was a late bloomer (hidden star) who didn't emerge into a starting role until his red-shirt junior year of college (fourth year). Walter had many experiences with adversity. This adversity gave him opportunities to choose to be committed to his long term goals. Success and stardom did not come easy. He had to continue to develop by getting stronger, tougher, and more consistent.

Interviewer: You talked about hard work and dedication? Help me to understand what you mean by that?

Walter: "I wake up at 7 in the morning and take off running around the whole town. 'Oh, he's jogging', but it's bigger than that, you know. It's the stuff that those cameras on ESPN don't see; it's the work that you put in."

Walter recognized how hard he worked when no one else was looking is what will helped him to be one of the best defensive backs. This is how Walter is accountable. He makes sure that he is always physically and mentally prepared to bring his best performance.

Professional

Walter constantly uses self-talk to motivate himself. During pre-game, he reflects on his past and the things that matter most to him. His family name means more to him than material items. Walter's past fuels his fighting spirit, which helps him to be mentally tough. He wants to be elite, and to him, that means he has to be a playmaker on the field. Walter talks to himself during the game to help him keep his level of play better than most. He was selected to play in the Pro Bowl. During the Pro Bowl he made several big plays and was very proud of himself.

Interviewer: Tell me about the pro bowl?

Walter: "Like I said, being the (he named his draft position) defensive back taken in the draft that year I came out, I still hold that grudge-not nothing personal; but I hold a grudge upon myself. What did I do wrong to be the (he named his draft position) defensive back took off the board, you know. And only thing in my mind I want to be better than all of those defensive backs that have got taken before me. It's nothing

personal towards them. It's just that I want to just show it. You know what I mean? This is what you passed up on. I want to be one of the best when I'm done. I want my name to mean a lot."

Walter is talking about the NFL draft where there were several defensive backs selected before him in the draft and he believed that he was better than the all of those selected. He wanted to prove to himself and others that he was better than those selected before him. He used that experience as fuel for his fire to make sure that everyone knows his name and who he is.

Interviewer: Talking to yourself, what do you mean?

Walter: "Numerous times. I have a pregame ritual, where I just basically sit there and I allow myself to think of all of the things I've been through in all of my life and I talk to myself like, 'IT'S TIME!' I play every game like it's my last one. Like literally, I know a lot of what you hear as far as what's out here in the books and stuff like that, but most athletes do that and I quote myself a lot when I say stuff like that. Like during the game, you know, I get tired, or something, like that, I'm human. You know I get tired and I'll talk to myself in my helmet like, 'let's go, you know it's time, (laugh) game on the line, let's go!' I force myself to actually go out there and I want to be the one that makes the play."

Walter uses positive self-talk before each game to reflect on his life to get himself to an optimal level of arousal to play his best. When things get tough on the field and he gets tired, he talks to himself to make sure his performance stays at a high level. Walter always wants to make the play.

Interviewer: Tell me about the Pro Bowl?

Walter: "And you know; my NFL team wasn't sure that they wanted to clear me to go over there and play. And so I was like, I don't care what ya'll say, I'm going over there and I want to play in this Pro Bowl. Because you know it's opportunity and at the time you know they talking about getting rid of it. I said there's no way, you going to get rid of this Pro Bowl without me playing in it. And when I got the opportunity, I just, like I said, when I got over there, I'm playing with guys like Drew Brees, Payton Manning and then get an interception in the Pro Bowl, and almost get another one."

Walter was selected to the Pro Bowl and he had an injured hand. His team was unsure if he would be able to participate but Walter was determined to not miss this opportunity. During the game, he played extremely well.

Interviewer: You talked about humility and being humble. What makes you humble, what makes you have humility?

Walter: "And, you know, you can bring me the biggest diamond in the world and I don't get amused by it. You know what I'm saying? Because, it's just not my type, it's not my cup of tea to have luxury things. Everybody in life want those things and then when you finally get it, you realized that they're not, you know what I'm saying, they ain't all what they cracked up to be. So, I think, like I said, just not having nothing. For every kid out there, I want to tell them, but some, I think kids have to go through it to see it. Like all those Jordan's and stuff that come out every week. You know, coming up all I wanted was Jordan's. Now I got every color and don't wear one pair. So basically, you know, it's important until you get it. You know, and those material things, they don't mean anything so that just, that keeps me humble."

Walter used to be motivated by material items but now he realizes that they don't mean anything to him. He doesn't allow material things to have a negative effect on his humility. Walter realizes humility is important for him to maintain his focus.

Interviewer: You made several references that you do this cause you want to do it. Expand upon that.

Walter: "That's the way I look at it now. This ain't even about me no more, you know what I mean. Like when I just told you the luxury, the luxury and great things that come with, you know, playing football the money and stuff like that. I pat myself on the back with that because that's not what I play the game for. You know what I'm saying. Like I said, my name means more than that. I named my son after me for a reason, because, you know, when I'm gone, and he have to carry on I want my name to mean something. I want people when they say his name, you know like, they got great things to say about his father. And that's the reason I play the game, like for real. And, you know, it shows on the field. I want to go out there every play and play likes it's my last play. That's the only reason why I play the game."

Walter talks about how material things are not meaningful to him. Rather, his family name is where he now derives meaning. He wants to be a good father and for his son to be proud of his name. He wants people to know his name through his work ethic and accomplishments.

Interviewer: Why?

Walter: "Because it goes further than what you're doing now. Like I said, when you speak of your position, you want to bring up. You want your name to be mentioned with the elite class. And that's as far as it

goes. You work hard for a reason, and find your own reason. I work hard for my name. Like I said, when you say my name, you say elite. That's how I want to be remembered."

Walter wants people to remember him and his name as being associated with being elite.

Interviewer: What makes you better than most? You're a Pro Bowler. That means something. What makes you better than most?

Walter: "Like, I said my drive, number one, and that same attitude, that I got as far as when I said I was the (athlete named number) defensive back picked in the draft – that same drive, you know what I'm saying. I want to be better than most. I don't want to be just another defensive back on the team, you know. I don't want just be taking up a roster spot. I want to be, I want to be a part of success. I want be, I want to make that last play that win this ball game. I want that feeling. I think about that all the time. That fourth and one stop, I want to make this stop."

Walter wants to be known as one of the best and a playmaker. He wants to live a life of significance and prove that he is worthy of recognition.

Interviewer: What do team and family mean? Why is family important to you? Describe to me in terms of leadership. Tell me about leadership.

Walter: "Leadership is huge. Like I said earlier, I don't want to be just another guy on the field. In order to do that you have to show up and sometimes let my play speak for it. You know, I use to not be one of them guys that whoop and holler and you know, cause a scene. I'm one of the guys that will pull you to the side of the field. I'm not going to run up and down on the side of the field, doing all that crazy stuff, modeling my emotions. I do that when I make a

play, but I'm that guy that's in your ear. That defensive tackle, you know, you don't expect the defensive back be up there by a defensive tackle. Like, I do that because, like I said, we family. When we are on that field, when all 11 of us on that field, we going to war together. That's how I want everybody to respect me as. I just want to lead us to victory, that's my ultimate goal."

Walter wants to be known as a leader. He recognizes his leadership style is one that is more personal and less overt. He values emotional stability and self-control.

Interviewer: You mentioned the word "war" a few times, what is that about?

Walter: "WAR, basically you know; Ready to go to WAR and that speaks for itself. Like always, not sometimes, or whatever, when we going to war I'm always ready. You can count on me to be there, it speaks for itself, always ready, not sometimes. Any time you ready for war I'm always ready."

Walter uses war as an analogy for the football field as his battlefield. He is always ready to play football.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you bring to your team that you think has been part of your success.

Walter: "I feel like passion, basically. Lot of passion! It's been numerous of times where I've told my teammates before we even went out, like I want to be the first one to make the play. And you know they say the same thing, I want to be the first to make the play, then you know what'll happen is you know, spark everybody up. You know, everybody, everybody you know out there licking their chops to make that first play. And, and to be fortunate enough to be the one that make the first play, to get the momentum of the team going, you know what I mean, you basically you want that feeling."

Walter describes his enthusiasm on the football field and how he uses his energy to help motivate his teammates.

Interviewer: You've talked about a few things, but, answer this, what motivates you?

Walter: "Now right now, my son, number one. You know, that's, my main motivation. Number two is a willingness to be great, to be elite. You know, I want to be elite and whatever it takes to do that I'm willing to do because I know it's not going to come to me sitting on my butt all the time. So I have to put the work in to be elite. "

The top two things that motivate Walter are his son and his desire to be elite.

Interviewer: Is there anything I haven't covered that you think has been part of your success?

Walter: "I think I adapt to failure pretty good, from life, football, anything. You know, I get emotional at times, when I fail, of course, we all do. But it's how you deal with failure what makes you a better person and I feel like I do a great, an awesome job at that. I just use that stuff in motivation."

Walter uses failure as an opportunity to make changes and improve his performance.

Interviewer: What do you think about mental toughness?

Walter: "I think mental toughness is more important than physical toughness sometimes. So much a lot, because when your physical toughness fails you, all you got is your mental toughness. You see what I'm saying. And if you lose your mental toughness, you are screwed, you are screwed. Because the man beside you, he is going to, he is going to get you. And that's the way I look at it, because, you know there's been times when I'm dead tired, you know. My knees and everything is aching. But you are not

going to beat me is what I'm telling myself. You are not, I don't care if I'm about to pass out. You not going to run me over and you are not going to catch this ball on me. Mental toughness is so important in whatever you do. If you ain't got that; you ain't got nothing."

Walter is talking about the importance of mental toughness. He believes it is more important than physical toughness. Walter uses his mental toughness to overcome his internal psychological and physical barriers to continue to elicit his best performance.

Interviewer: What do you want to do next?

Walter: *"WIN A SUPER BOWL! After football? Is what you are talking about? I want to win a Super Bowl."*

Walter's next big goal is winning a Super Bowl.

Interviewer: You're one of the best. What is it about being the best that you think most people don't know?

Walter: *"One thing about being the best is that somebody's always after you. As far as, somebody's always looking to be better than you. And to remain the best, you have to do, you have to do better. That's the way I look at it. I'm using Michael Jordan for instance. Somebody's always, you're always hearing somebody comparing themselves to Michael Jordan. Until, one day, somebody's going to say, 'you know what I want to be better than Michael Jordan'. I want to set the standards so high when I'm done for the next defensive back. I want to be a complete defensive back from interceptions to big hits, everything, I want to be able to do it all. Set the standard so hard, the bar so high for the position of defensive back and change the whole, just the evolution of the position. So when you say strong defensive back, I want to hear somebody say, 'Play it like (insert Walter's name)'. That's how I want to be."*

Walter is talking about what it takes to be the best. He realizes that being the best presents a new set of challenges, being that you have to be willing to work just as hard or harder to remain on top. He wants to be known as the standard of comparison for the defensive back position.

Alan

“..just want to be successful in the back of my mind every day, just driving me.”

Alan: Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
College	Self-talk	Intrinsic motivation
	Mental toughness	Intrinsic motivation/ Competence
	Injury and rehabilitation	Autonomy/ Intrinsic motivation/ Relatedness
Professional	Motivation	Intrinsic motivation
	Fear of failure	Intrinsic motivation
	Work ethic	Competence
	Competitive	Competence
	Socio-economic family struggles	Relatedness/ Intrinsic motivation
	Deliberate practice	Competence/ Autonomy

Table 8 - Alan's lived experiences reflecting Self-Determination

College

Alan broke his leg during the third game of the season during his final year (red-shirt sophomore) in college. This happened four weeks before the biggest game of the season, a game in which Alan was determined to play. He used self-talk while he was rehabbing his leg. Alan did not allow negative thoughts stay in his mind while he was going through the rehabilitation process. He was motivated by the “big game” which is a characteristic of people with mental toughness.

Interviewer: You're a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity, and if so, what, and describe it and how it affects you?

Alan: *“Man, I'll never forget. I was doing rehab in the pool, and I was sprinting in the pool and my leg is killing me. And I'm like, what in the hell am I doing, like for real, like seriously. It never once crossed my mind to stop, don't, don't, you don't have to do this.”*

No, never that. I think going through all that I was getting better and better every day. And I think, um, me just seeing the improvements."

Alan remained focused on the day-to-day goal and progress he was making. His mindset did not include questions or doubts that would delay him from returning to football. He remained focused on the positives.

Professional

Alan had intrinsic motivation as well as fear of failure motivating him to succeed. He has always been a very competitive person. Alan used his family's socio-economic struggles as motivation to achieve more. He believes that he can be successful at anything he wants to do. Alan has a strong work ethic. He applies this work ethic to everything he does, which feeds his self-confidence. Alan believes he is always ready to play the game.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Alan: "(laugh) probably my drive. I think, just failure, I mean the being scared of failing really. I think since I've really started competing in anything. I didn't want to be the guy to lose. I think it just came natural."

Alan realizes he has a strong drive to succeed and has a strong sense of fear of failure. He is very competitive and does not want to ever lose at anything.

Elaborating on what he believes contributes to his desire to succeed, Alan offers...

Alan: *"...just want to be successful in the back of my mind every day, just driving me."*

Alan has a strong intrinsic desire to be successful.

Interviewer: Talk more about that drive. Think back, where did that drive come from? Dig into that for me.

Alan: *"Just drive, I mean, I don't, I don't know how to really explain it. I just, I don't know if it's attitude, anger, whatever it is; it's something like, I don't know, YOU CAN'T STOP ME!"*

Alan is very self-confident and believes nothing can stop him from pursuing whatever it is he desires. He is unsure how to categorize it. However, his comments strongly reflect the competence component of Self-Determination Theory.

Interviewer: Is it there every day?

Alan: *"Yeah"*

Interviewer: Is it there in the morning?

Alan: *"In every aspect of everything I do. Drive; and, it just doesn't feel right if I'm not working hard. It doesn't feel right if I'm not winning."*

Alan derives his self-confidence through a strong work ethic. He likes the feeling of winning. His commitment to improving is reflective of intrinsic motivation and competence.

Interviewer: You talk about winning, drive, and determination. What is it about winning that drives you?

Alan: *"(laugh) the glorification of winning, I guess, really. Everybody loves a winner. I don't know, I think things work a couple ways. People settle for what they can do. I feel like people, everybody tries to do something. Everybody wants to spread*

and run the race. And there's a couple that are gonna get really close to winning and there's a couple who are gonna lose that race and they may not even think about it. They might be like, alright I lost that race, and I'll never be a runner. Like, and they'll settle with that and so my thing is, those people just fall in to the back. They don't care about winning, but like the people that take the initiative, who just take the initiative to even try and to put forth to become a winner. They might have finished 3rd in that race, but they know they have the potential to be first place like just that, knowing that you can make it to how he gets treated. Like third place, nobody cares about third place, so I think just if you can talk yourself in to working into a winner's position. That's how I think of it."

Alan believes there are different kinds of people when it comes to the will to win. He believes some people are satisfied with losing and it does not bother them and then there are some people that come close to winning. Some of those people know they have the ability to be a winner and they can use positive self-talk to work hard to be a winner.

Interviewer: What type of talk do you do with yourself?

Alan: "I talk a lot, I don't know, I talk like I overthink a lot of stuff. I think that's my first thing. I don't know I talk a lot – it's like just don't fail basically that's basically my thing. You can do it. Basically, it's a lot of self-motivation. You can do it!"

Alan engages in self-talk and uses it as motivation to be great. He has a fear of failure that drives him to succeed.

Interviewer: Do you think most players are like that?

Alan: "No."

Interviewer: What makes you different?

Alan: "I'm different than any other player who plays any sport because I think about what you want to do, what you're counter move is gonna be, how you can react to what I'm gonna do, how I can affect what you do and how and then I think about what I'm gonna do? I think I see a lot of angles when I'm doing things. So I feel like, if we're racing, it's facing, you're faster than me. I'ma trip you. I'm gonna do something so I can win this race. I think, I'm thinking constantly about the way I can beat you. (Laugh)"

Alan is very strategic about competition. He anticipates thoughts and movements before they happen. With Alan, competition is more like chess and not checkers.

Interviewer: Looking back, dig in to that.

Alan: "About how, just what separates me from other people?"

Interviewer: Yes, the drive. What you're describing? Think back to where that came from?

Alan: "And I'm, man, like I'm jealous like, damn, like, I was like I was kind like a kid, so I'll learn what they do. I'm gonna do whatever I can to just. I'll get it, I'll get it. And then, I think I got it, like, times ten. And it just happened, like everything I learned. Once it's time for me to be the guy, that, you know, someone else is looking at, I'll make sure it's hard to catch me. The drive man, I don't know, it's just natural. I grew up pissed off. So, I think that's it really."

Alan desires to be the one that receives the glorification, for being the great one. When he sees something that he wants he goes after it, and then becomes better at it than those he is emulating. Alan

is self-motivated by anger. This is reflective of his inherent competitive nature.

Interviewer: Pissed off, pissed off at who, what?

*Alan: "World; the fact of me hanging around older people. I might be the guy out of that group that might not be cool. And then family life, single mom, sisters, all those things, life man. I just grew up, you not gonna f*ck up my day! You can't stop me today! You can't!"*

Alan grew up around peers older than he was and those times shaped his mindset. Different circumstances provided adversity for him to develop a fighting spirit to overcome obstacles.

Interviewer: What makes you different?

Alan: "In football, in life general? Selfishly speaking, I'm good at everything I do. Everything I do. Like, I'm not, I play the piano. I didn't start playing the piano until two years ago. I'm damn near a good piano... I can play the piano. Um, basketball, I was pretty good at basketball. I mean, sports wise, I can do sports. I can speak on that all day. I can do a lot of things. Like, I mean I can draw, I can, I can sing, I can. I can. And, I don't say this. I mean people tell me these things. So, I mean it's not like I'm just sitting there like, 'oh I think I can'. People tell me these things. I can play the drums, um, well I don't know. I'm good at whatever I put my mind to I'm gonna do it and I think that's why I'm different from a lot of people. A lot of people can do a lot of things, but they can't do them to the, to top level. Like, people can, you know, draw but they might draw a stick figure. They might, they might draw a nice face or something. But I can, I do, I try to do everything, I can do everything to the top level. I'm different because, I'm different than what you see. (Laugh) People look at me and they're kind of like, 'oh man', they kind of get like they, they don't know, they,

*they. I'm definitely, um, miss understood. Then I open my mouth and then they are like 'oh sh*t', let's have a conversation we can really talk, we can chop it up. I mean I've talked to a lot of people and they're like, you know, you're different than what, you know, we perceived. So I think I'm different than that because I can carry a conversation on with, you know, the Bill Gates; I can carry a conversation on with the street lord on the corner; I can talk to anybody. I can carry myself, I don't know, I can adapt."*

Alan is very self-confident which leads to self-efficacy. He believes he can do anything he desires. He believes he has the ability to be multi-talented and tries different hobbies to challenge him to conquer something new and different. Alan is very able to socially adapt to any person or situation. This requires emotional flexibility.

Interviewer: What motivates you?

Alan: "I don't wanna fail, really! And you only get one go around at this whole life thing. I think I want to leave behind something."

Alan wants to leave a legacy and does not want to fail at the goal. He wants to be remembered as one of the best players to have ever played his position.

Interviewer: You're a top NFL player, talk about responsibility in regards to that.

Alan: "You got a lot you carry, if you chose to look at it that way. I don't look at it, like, I look at it like, I do what I do, but I don't look at it like I'm carrying a load. So responsibility wise is really, like, my responsibility is to do what I do to the best of my ability to the best I can, and, to be true to who I am. To bust my ass in everything I do. And, to definitely, like, just I think, just really, just do what you're

supposed to do. Honestly, I mean, I think anything responsibility wise like. I don't know; it's not hard."

Alan realizes that he carries a lot of weight in regards to being a role model. He understands that a lot of responsibility comes with being a first-round draft pick. He chooses not to put that kind of pressure on himself and focuses on working hard and being himself.

Stan

“...I mean that’s the best advice that anybody can give someone is just be yourself.”

Alan: Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
College	Self-talk	Intrinsic motivation
	Mental toughness	Intrinsic motivation/ Competence
	Injury and rehabilitation	Autonomy/ Intrinsic motivation/ Relatedness
Professional	Motivation	Intrinsic motivation
	Fear of failure	Intrinsic motivation
	Work ethic	Competence
	Competitive	Competence
	Socio-economic family struggles	Relatedness/ Intrinsic motivation
	Deliberate practice	Competence/ Autonomy

Table 9 - Stan’s lived experiences reflecting Self-Determination

Before High School

Stan considers himself to be a leader. When he was younger, he witnessed his two older brothers making mistakes with life decisions. He was determined to make good decisions and not make the same mistakes. Stan set measurable, specific, and attainable goals that would guide him to success. He was determined to go to college, graduate and be a great football player.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: “You know, you just; that was so, that made me want to be part of that as well. So I knew that in order to reach that, that I had to, you know, do the right things because I saw how my two older brothers didn’t, they didn’t make it.”

Stan was a member of a family that had a reputation for being great athletes and he wanted to add to the legacy as well. He knew in

order to live up to family expectations he had to make good decisions so he would not fall victim to big mistakes. This is where Stan developed his sense of autonomy. He realized, what he achieved in life, would largely be a result of the decisions he makes.

Stan: "See me, I'm not, I'm not a follower. And, I don't know, if that it's just, I just think it's in my DNA to not be a follower. Like always, when I was a kid, I never just went with the crowd just because everybody said, you know this is what to do, that's what you should do."

Stan views himself as a leader and believes that is his character. He did not give into the temptation to follow along with the crowd. Before entering high school, Stan attributed his potential for future success, to his inherent sense of autonomy.

High School

Stan experienced adversity during high school. His family became displaced when Hurricane Rita devastated their town. Overcoming this adversity served as motivation for him to make the right decisions for himself. One of the most important decisions was deciding which college he would attend during the recruiting process. While in high school, Stan had a teacher who doubted him and his ability to achieve his goals. Proving this teacher wrong served as a source of motivation while Stan was in high school.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "And I think that that made me stronger too as well also; that made me want to push for more."

Stan's family was victims of Hurricane Rita and it was a time with his family that was filled with adversity. After a successful high school career, Stan discusses making the decision of which college to attend. He believes those circumstances made him stronger and developed a desire to achieve more.

*Stan: "I was like, watch. She said, 'if you a first round draft pick, then I'ma fly to your first game'; she didn't fly to my first game, she was just bull sh*tting. I think she doubted me. I come from a place with a lot of haters. Like, it's a small town, everybody know everything. And they act like, you know when you're there, they are like, 'oh man', yeah, but when you know, really, I can. I have ability, you know, I can see, you know who's real and who's not. So anyways, that was good, that was awesome when I went first round; she was the first person I thought about. So, so I guess that made me tick too."*

Stan had a high school teacher who did not believe he would succeed at his dream of being a first-round draft pick. He wanted to prove her wrong for not believing in him and his dreams.

College

Stan set high goals while in college. Graduating and proving himself to be worthy of becoming an NFL first-round draft choice were his priorities. After his junior year in college, he received a lower draft prediction than he desired. Stan decided to return to school and work

harder his senior season and graduate from college. He was successful in being chosen as an NFL first-round draft pick.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "I was mainly concerned with getting to the league. I mean I'm not going to say football is everything. But, to me, you know, at that time that was all I could think about was just find the plateau to get to me to that next plateau. So I got a chance to start on varsity as a sophomore and things went well."

Stan had an intense desire to be a professional football player which is intrinsic motivation. He became a starter in college as a sophomore, which was a major step towards that goal.

Stan: "You know, but, I had a plan, so, so and I knew I had to stick with my plan. I've always been one of those guys to where like, I guess that's the line, this is good, that's bad. I'm, I'm pretty much right in the middle. I like to kick it, but I know you know when I got to do what I got to do."

Stan had a goal of being a professional football player and had formulated a plan to get there. Goal achievement was a major theme in Stan's reported lived experiences, and he was able to achieve his goals through autonomy, remaining aware at all times of the need to make good decisions. While in college, he chose to be social and have a good time without allowing himself to cross any lines that would interfere with his goals. Stan illustrates his emphasis on good decision-making below in discussing the process of choosing the right academic program for him.

Stan: "So I mean, it, it kind of made sense to go back to school, I was only a semester away from graduating which would just make my moms, my mom's world, you know, going back to school and graduating. So I was like, 'Hey, go back for one more year, be the face of Mid-Western University'. Hey, it's pretty cool, cause I, I thought I had a good little set up."

Stan debated whether to enter the NFL draft early as a junior or return for his senior season. He decided to return for his senior season to graduate, which would make his mother proud and be the leader and face of Mid-Western University. Stan made many good decisions while attending college, which led to the culmination of graduating and being a first-round draft pick.

Professional

Stan was very confident in his abilities. Much of his confidence comes from his work ethic. Prior to the NFL combine, Stan trained in California. He used the time to prepare and work himself into top shape. Stan used a positive mindset once he arrived at the NFL Combine in Indianapolis to deliver his best possible performance. Stan then prepared for Pro Day at his university after the NFL Combine. Stan's preparation moved him up on the draft board to become a first-round draft pick. After Stan was drafted, he continued to work in training camp and practice, until he became a starter. He describes practice as work and game day as playtime.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "That's I mean that's the best advice that anybody can give someone is just be yourself."

Stan received advice about having integrity and being himself. He considers this advice valuable and something that anyone can give or receive.

Interviewer: Tell me about game day.

Stan: "That's my day. That ain't work, that ain't work, that's my day, that's play. The locker room! During the week, that's work, Sunday, don't say nothing to me, that's my day. (Emotional) My bad, man."

Stan considers practice to be work and game day to be a time to play. For Stan, practice was a time to develop his confidence, while game day was a time to demonstrate his competence. Stan is also highly emotionally invested in his game time performances.

*Stan: "And when I'm on that field, my teammates know, and I put in that work throughout the week. I study, I go hard, straight up. Coach asks a question, I'm on it, I know my sh*t, and I take pride in that."*

Stan believes that when he is on the football field, everyone knows how hard he works throughout the week. He takes pride in his preparation.

The following chart provides a brief, cross-case analysis with examples of direct comments from each player illustrating their experience with self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy.

In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? How did autonomy support their successful performance? How did they gain their sense of autonomy?	
Walter	<p>“...basically put me in a position where I wanted better out of life. That is what forced me to be a better athlete and a better person.” (p.91)</p> <p>“And you know, I’m one of them people, I’m a self-motivator. Nobody can motivate me more than myself.” (p.92)</p> <p>“I just was the type that when I start something, I never quit, and I wanted to be the best at it.” (p.92)</p>
Alan	<p>“So, and just want to be successful in the back of my mind every day, just driving me.” (p.105)</p> <p>“I’m different than any other player who plays any sport because I think about what you want to do, what you’re counter move is gonna be, how you can react to what I’m gonna do, how I can affect what you do and how and then I think about what I’m gonna do?” (p.107)</p> <p>“I mean, I don’t know. It’s like, it’s really just that mentality of I wanna, I wanna come out here and even if I’m not really feeling like it.” (p.163)</p>
Stan	<p>“Like always when I was a kid I never just went with the crowd just because everybody said you know this is what to do that’s what you should do.” (p.112)</p> <p>“Coach asks a question, I’m on it, I know my sh*t and I take pride in that.” (p.116)</p> <p>“That’s, I mean that’s the best advice that anybody can give someone is just be yourself.” (p.116)</p>

Chart 4 – Cross-Case analysis with excerpts reflecting components of Self-Determination

From Chart 4 above, there would appear to be substantial evidence that the athletes reported and described multiple experiences

that would represent the key components of Self-Determination Theory, relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Tables 7, 8, and 9 above).

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) theorizes when people take control of the things they can control in their own lived experience, they have enhanced motivation and effectiveness. For this control to happen, SDT further suggests that when the lived experience includes relatedness, competence, and personal engagement, coupled with autonomous decision-making, intrinsic motivation is predominant, leading to enhanced personal effectiveness. The athletes in this study possessed evidence of self-determination. It is discovered in the narratives reflecting elements of Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory. The narratives from the athletes in this study included multiple experiences that would represent the key components of Self-Determination Theory, relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The chart below demonstrates the findings.

Walter, Alan, and Stan all shared how they were motivated by wanting more out of life. They all experienced humble beginnings and came from low socio-economic family backgrounds. Their backgrounds created an environment where each of these three athletes developed a fighting spirit and became very self-determined. Leaving a legacy, in

spite of the early adversity that they encountered is something that fueled their fire to be the best.

There is a lot of evidence for the presence of the elements of Self-Determination and Flourish. Coming from difficult environments, these athletes were surrounded by friends and family who experienced tough circumstances from certain life decisions, and the athletes themselves also could have followed a similar path. Each of these athletes reported similar experiences of friends and family, while not reported in this study, could have easily followed the same path.

“I play for the name on my back!”

“It’s all about me right now!”

When they were young, the players in this study, found themselves in settings, where they were with groups of other young people who were on the wrong path. The negative influences could have included other kids in the neighborhood, kids at their school and in some cases even members of their own family. And in those settings, were confronted with adult figures in their lives, who would chastise them with, “you’ll never make anything of yourself”. “You are just like your friends, brothers, etc. You will all end up no good, in jail, or dead.” These three athletes, were confronted with, and had a choice to make, whether they would continue to associate with and behave like these friends on the wrong path and continue to find themselves in

trouble with the law, or authorities; or, were they going to take a different path. And, in their experience on this path they each had an awakening. They each realized they had a choice to make that would change the trajectory of their lives to positive.

“It’s all about me right now. There is an ‘T’ in ‘WIN’”

In their search for the right path, they found football. And in their football experience they have ended up in this study. These players did not just find football or get good at football. They ended up in the NFL, and they ended up as the best at their positions in the NFL. And, exploring their lived experience they shared and uncovered a very profound and impacting perspective. And that perspective can be summarized in the statement, the affirmation, “I play for the name on my back.”

FLOURISH AND PERMA

Flourish theorizes when people experience components of PERMA (**P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**chievement) in their lives, they will be happier and flourish. The PERMA model states that people do not need to be fulfilled in all categories to Flourish (Seligman, 2011b). Seligman (2011b) suggests that each of these five components meet three critical properties in order to be included in the construct of well-being. These properties include: (1) it must contribute to well-being, (2) many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements, and (3) it is defined and measured independently of the other elements.

The first component of PERMA is **P**ositive emotion, which includes joy, contentment, pleasure, and interest. Second, Seligman describes **E**ngagement as "flow". The third component, positive **R**elationships, serve as the foundation for well-being. According to Seligman the fourth component of well-being, **M**eaning, refers to a sense of "belonging to and serving something perceived to be bigger than the self." Lastly, **A**chievement is closely linked to the concept of intrinsic motivation (Seligman, 2011a). This would be especially true in sport.

What in the player's lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?

Walter

“My ultimate goal after that is I want to raise all my kids up and basically be a great father.”

Walter: Flourish and PERMA		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
College	Life and football	Meaning/ Engagement
	Deceased teammate	Positive Relationships
Professional	Fatherhood	Positive emotions/ Achievement/ Positive Relationships/ Meaning

Table 10 - Walter's lived experiences reflecting Flourishing

College

Walter believes that football and life are synonymous. He lost a teammate in college while they were preparing to play football. Walter wears the same number of his fallen college teammate. Walter believes that every play in football is special, and he plays every play like it is his last.

Interviewer: You mentioned football and you mentioned life. Tell me what those two words mean to you.

Walter: *“You could put those words in the same sentence. They are exactly the same words to me. When you think about football and life they're both the same. Because, you know what I mean, if you look back, I'm talking about a former teammate now, when he passed, that was definitely a wake-up call. You know what I'm saying? This is the real deal. You know what I'm saying the same thing that I lost a friend over, I'm doing this every day. You know what I'm*

saying? This is, any day it can be over. Same thing in life, you know, when you turn on the news, any day it can be over. You got to play every down like it's the last one; same in life. Everything, every day you live you got to live it like it's your last one. Be grateful for every play you get and every day you get. You know what I'm saying? That's how I look at it."

Walter believes that his being able to play football is a blessing.

He lives his life with gratitude and chooses to maximize every day.

PERMA elements: positive relationships, and meaning.

Professional

Walter takes great pride in being a father. He believes that being a great father is important as a man.

Walter: "...I'm a father now, and you know how that goes, I got my own stuff going on. "

Interviewer: What do you want to do next?

Walter: "My ultimate goal after that is I want to raise all my kids up and basically be a great father. I definitely want to be that, that's number one more than anything. I want to just to have that feeling to be involved in child, my son and the rest of my kids in the future. There is something about that feeling that really makes you a man. I want that feeling."

Walter wants to be in his children's lives. He wants to be a dedicated parent who is always there for support. This gives him meaning in life. Positive relationships and Engagement are Walter's most prominent elements of PERMA.

Alan

“I want to be remembered, you know. So, I try to do things that will keep me remembered, anywhere I go, from my middle school, to my high school, to college, to the pros, to wherever I go.”

Alan: Flourish and PERMA		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Talent	Engagement
	Peer influence	Positive Relationships
Professional	Legacy	Meaning/ Achievement
	Positive influence	Engagement/ Meaning
	Role model	Engagement/ Positive Relationships
	Fatherhood	Engagement / Positive Relationships
	Football is war	Meaning
	Teammates and brothers	Positive Relationships

Table 11 - Alan’s lived experiences reflecting Flourishing

Before High School

Alan grew up knowing that he was a very talented kid. Many of his friends were older and more developed. This dynamic made it a challenging environment. Alan was a great competitor and desired to be better than his older friends, although that did not happen much. Therefore, Alan continued to work harder.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Alan: “Whether it’s me being a little kid and racing with my friends in the street or seeing who can win another game of knock out a basketball. Just that feeling of losing, you know, the way it made me feel, I didn’t want to feel like that so I think, knowing the abilities that I’ve been blessed with just talent wise and athletic wise, and just the drive I have. It all works together because you know you put those things together, and whatever you do whether, you know, you running a race you’re eventually not gonna to lose, you’re going to win.”

Alan has always enjoyed playing sports and believes he has been given many talents. He considers them to be a blessing. Alan believes that as long as he keeps trying, he will eventually succeed. PERMA elements: engagement, positive relationships, and meaning.

Interviewer: Talk more about drive. Think back, where did that drive come from?

Alan: "Honestly, I don't know. I hung out with a lot of kids older than me growing up. So, like, I think they were always better than me at everything. And I always saw like, man, this is, I don't know, like, they're better than me and I feel like I can compete with them. Like I mean, I see how they get treated basically. I mean, I see how they live. I mean, everybody likes them and I guess just that feeling of being on top. Or just seeing how that feels and how they get treated really."

Alan grew up around peers that were older than he was and he was able to play and compete with them. He feels they were better than he was but he was always able to compete. He became aware of how the older guys were respected and desired to be treated the same. PERMA elements: positive relationships and meaning.

Interviewer: Yes, the drive. What you're describing? Think back to where that came from?

Alan: "And, I think for me, like, it was just like once again, growing up around a lot of people who were really talented. I was never really the most talented out of the group I was with, I was probably the like the least talented. And, that always kind of nagged me because I feel like I was good at what I did in anything. And then, I mean I'm young, and I'm hanging around guys who can dunk, who can run really fast, who can rap really good, who can,

everything they do they're at the top of whatever they do."

Alan perceived his friends around him to be very talented and he was not as talented as they were. He believed in his abilities but they were always better. PERMA elements: positive relationships and meaning.

Professional

Alan has a desire to be a role model. He now realizes he is in a position and has the ability to be a positive influence on many people. One of the most important roles he has is being a father. Alan wants to be recognized as a person of greatness. This is driving Alan to leave a legacy. When he is on the football field he considers it to be war. He views his teammates as brothers, and they are soldiers at war together. PERMA elements: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and achievement.

Interviewer: What motivates you?

Alan: "I want to be remembered, you know. So, I try to do things that will keep me remembered, anywhere I go, from my middle school, to my high school, to college, to the pros, to wherever I go. I want people to be like, we can walk in here and damn he was here, you know, he was here. And I want to affect the people that I was around in the right way. So that they can tell so and so, you know, I was worked with so and so. I played with so and so. I know so and so. And that they can, influence people, I want to, I want to influence people and that motivates me. Because like with the, the, the thing that I'm blessed with doing I have the ability to influence a lot of

*people. Which I'm learning now (laugh). Uh, but uh, and that's another thing, like, I think about this all the time, we all come here to play football, we all come here. And then we kind of like get these responsibilities that nobody asked for, you know, we're like, 'oh sh*t', now we're role models, now we have to, now we can't. You know, we're like so I'm mean it's crazy because it's like, I'm 23 years old and I'm carrying damn near a city, I'm carry damn near a, I'm not gonna say a state, but, I'm carrying a lot of people on my shoulders. And it's not like, something that you can't really ask for. Something you do; it just happens. Like, I mean, you're good at whatever you do and then people like it. So there you go. Just that, and that the fact, that I can help out and affect people. I'm not really gonna to say always help I'm gonna say affect, because I can affect a lot of people. And, I guess that motivates me. Recently, I mean, I'm a father now, I have a four month old son. So, the affect, I gotta effect, I do this now, I gotta leave, I gotta let people know. (Laugh)"*

Alan realizes he has a responsibility and has the ability to influence a lot of people. He wants to leave a legacy and be a positive influence around those who depend on and look up to him. Alan realizes he is a role model and wants to be responsible with his abilities. PERMA elements: meaning, and achievement.

Interviewer: Talk about responsibility?

Alan: "It kind of carries off of the whole affecting thing, I mean. Responsibility with your job or responsibility like, what are you like?"

Alan realizes he carries a lot of responsibility.

Interviewer: You're a top NFL player, talk about responsibility in regards to that.

Alan: "So NFL responsibility? I think, first off, your name means a lot, so every decision you make you gotta be responsible with it. You know, you got the team, the owners, you got, you know, the legacy of the team, I guess. I mean because before you go to a team, you hear. You know what I mean, everybody growing up; little kids watch the team and they're like. You know which players have been there doing whatever like. I mean you know what it is, so this, I think this responsibility. I play for the name on my back."

Alan understands in order to leave a legacy he has to make responsible decisions because his name is an important part. He understands that certain teams in the NFL have certain reputations and he is associated with that history. PERMA elements: meaning, and achievement.

Interviewer: Physically, mentally, and it's just and being present.

Alan: "Its war, with me, it's really like I don't know."

Alan believes football is as serious as war. He believes he does not have room for errors. PERMA element: engagement.

Interviewer: Talk about two things, coaches and teammates. Talk about whatever you want first.

Alan: "Teammates, brothers, it's a family. Really it's a family. It's a family. You go through so much with teammates. I think I feel like whatever it is. In school, you go to class with them, you're in the school with them and then after school you're, you're practicing with them. So I think they take up maybe 8 hours 9 hours of your day. You go home you see you family for a little bit. You know what I mean, so I feel like, I mean, if anything they're family."

Alan considers his teammates to be his brothers and part of a larger family. PERMA element: positive relationships.

Alan: "Everywhere I go, I'm the youngest guy, so, but I'm the best guy so it's kind of funny so it's like, I'm. Why are you all listening to me? Why? Right now, I'm in the NFL. I've got guys who are 33, 34 you know. You want me to tell them, I mean, I'll do it because I'm better but I've been watching them play on TV. I mean, so I just think, teammates, you gotta, you gotta figure out where you place in their lives you know. Because a lot of guys really ain't all that."

Alan: "You don't wanna be that teammate, you want to be somebody people will look up to and respect."

Alan carries a lot of respect with older guys because of his abilities and the way he carries himself. He wants to be respected.

PERMA element: positive relationships.

Alan: "You really see people's true colors. You know, you kind of see like who really does what. And, like those little things help you. You could have failed that day, but somebody else really helped you through it. And so, I think that is what team is for me. I think, I mean, you can be hurt, you know, who's talking up, who's picking up, who's picking up that weight."

Alan uses his teammates as a source of motivation through the tough times.

Interviewer: How have your past failures affected you?

*Alan: "I don't know, just. How have my past failures affected me? I feel like sh*t after I didn't do good really. I don't know. Nobody wants to lose, nobody wants to lose. Nobody wants to see; and everybody wants to create something for themselves. It might be on this scale it might be on that scale, everybody wants to create for themselves. And the scale I think*

is through the roof, and so failure to me is just not an option. It's not something I can tolerate, something I can deal with. It's just something that doesn't even register even really. So I think as far as failure like, I don't even think about that. I just know it's something, it can't happen. It's like me wearing pink."

Alan does not like the feeling of losing. He is driven to succeed and does not think about failing. PERMA element: achievement. Positive relationships and Engagement are Alan's most prominent elements of PERMA.

Stan

“...and I really just tried to surround myself with other people who were kind of like me.”

Stan: Flourish and PERMA		
Context	Lived Experience	Themes
Before High School	Family struggles	Positive Relationships
	Humbled beginnings	Positive emotions
High School	Family name	Positive Relationships / Meaning
	Friends and teammates	Positive Relationships
	Humbled beginnings	Positive emotions
	Family support	Positive emotions/ Positive Relationships
	Brother’s mistakes	Positive Relationships
College	High school teammates	Positive Relationships
	Decision making	Engagement
	Make people proud	Meaning/ Achievement
Professional	College teammates	Positive Relationships
	Respect from peers	Meaning/ Achievement
	Emotions on game day	Positive emotions/ Engagement

Table 12 - Stan’s lived experiences reflecting Flourishing

Before High School

Stan comes from a small town in the southern part of the United States. He experienced family and socio-economic struggles while growing up. Playing football was an outlet and an opportunity for advancement.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: “I think, you know, what really made me successful, was just, you know seeing my situation where I grew up. Where I’m from? I’m from (Stan names his home state). It’s a small town about 8,000 people and it’s not a lot, you know, going on there; not a lot of jobs. I mean it’s pretty much nothing really going on so– thing is to play ball.”

Stan played football in a small town in a Southern state. PERMA element: meaning.

High School

Stan played all the time with his friends who grew up in the same neighborhood. He always tried to make good choices with those he spent time with inside and outside of school. He wanted to go to college and play football. He had a lot of family support to succeed. Coming from humbled beginnings and learning from his brother's mistakes, became a great source of his motivation. Stan's last name provided a great sense of pride and succeeding was his ultimate goal.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "I'm with the kids all day. Anyways, so the thing was to play ball. So, my mom is a school teacher, so, I had to do well in school because that's how my mom is. You know how that is. I wanted to play ball and I realized what I needed to do in order to get there and I really just tried to surround myself with other people who were kind of like me, wanted to, to reach that as well. But growing up, you know, I wasn't around those type of people all of the time because everybody didn't have the same type of goals as me. So, it was a little different, you know, so, I tried to, you know, bring them along with me. They fall by the wayside and my mom would always tell me, you know. When you go to college, she's like, always strive to go to college."

Stan spent a lot of time playing with the kids at his school and in his neighborhood. He always tried to surround himself with good

people or bring those around him up to his level. PERMA element:
positive relationships.

Stan: "That was the main thing. Go to college. Ball was me, college was mom. I always strived to get there. It was gonna be football regardless. I probably wouldn't have left the state if I didn't play football, obviously. I just, I try to put myself around positive people to kind of help me reach my goals as well. So, I think that's one of the main things that made me successful in having my mom to be the rock of our family and being like that foundation that, that kept me, you know, aspiring to reach something greater and then ball just happened to be in my family."

Stan's mother instilled in him the importance of going to college. His mother was a strong positive force in his life and he always tried to make good decisions to be successful to make her proud. PERMA elements: positive relationships and achievement.

Stan: "The (Athlete #3 last name) in East Texas, I know you can't put the names and stuff but. In east in southeast Texas, like, our name, like football, athletes in my family, It's known that if you're a (Athlete #3 last name) that you're an athlete. So, you know, I just kind of try to , I try to be like half of what my family was, you know being was playing ball or any other sport, you know, it could be basketball, football, track. Uncle was a track coach. Dad went to college, played ball. Brothers went to college, played ball. See, cousins in other, cousins are professional ball players in other leagues. Great uncle is a baseball player."

Stan comes from an athletic family that participated in many sports. Many of his family members played in college and professionally. PERMA element: meaning.

College

Stan learned from his friends in high school not everyone wants to be successful. In college he surrounded himself with teammates that made good decisions and had high expectations. Stan recognized having positive relationships was essential to assisting him to be successful. Stan had a strong desire to make the people he cared about proud of him.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "It was really big for me to graduate cause my brothers, nobody in my family, my mom she's the only one that graduated in my immediate family. But um, big bro, he didn't graduate when he went to college. My other big bro, nothing, I mean not nothing, I mean, they just didn't graduate. And my sister, they're all close to graduating. I bet when I finish up if I start taking some classes, I bet that might make them do something too. But there all close to graduating, it's just, you know how it is."

Stan graduated from college and joined his mother as the only member of his immediate family to accomplish that goal. PERMA elements: meaning and achievement.

Professional

Stan had several of his college teammates and roommates make it to the NFL. He desires respect from his peers. He wants to earn their respect through his performance on game day. Stan uses his emotions to fuel him on game day. He has several rituals that he uses to psych himself up for optimal performance.

Interviewer: Tell me about game day.

Stan: "To be playing this game and getting paid for it. I remember being banged up, but, sh, every time I walk in that locker room see my name. I be sitting there and I'm like dang, like bro, I don't say we made it, I say we making it, we making me. I'm still going forward and enjoying myself at the same time."

Stan talks about how grateful he is to be able to play the game of football. It gives him great pride every time he walks into the locker room on game day and sees his jersey and locker with his name on it.

PERMA element: meaning.

The following chart provides brief, cross-case analysis examples of direct comments from each player illustrating their experience with Flourishing and PERMA.

What in the player’s lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?		
Walter	P	“Be grateful for every play you get and every day you get.” (p.123)
	E	“Everything, every day you live you got to live it like it’s your last one.” (p.123)
	R	“You know what I’m saying the same thing that I lost a friend over, I’m doing this every day.” (p.122)
	M	“When you think about football and life they’re both the same.” (p.122)
	A	“My ultimate goal after that is I want to raise all my kids up and basically be a great father.” (p.123)
Alan	P	“So, like, I think they were always better than me at everything. And I always saw like, man, this is, I don’t know, like, they’re better than me and I feel like I can compete with them.” (p.125)
	E	“I mean, so I just think, teammates, you gotta, you gotta figure out where you place in their lives you know.” (p.129)
	R	“I hung out with a lot of kids older than me growing up.” (p.125)
	M	“I want to be remembered, you know.” (p.126)
	A	“So, I try to do things that will keep me remembered, anywhere I go, from my middle school, to my high school, to college, to the pros, to wherever I go.” (p.126)
Stan	P	“Sundays, my days, so I have some fun. I have a good time.” (p.179)
	E	“...and I really just tried to surround myself with other people who were kind of like me wanted to, to reach that as well.” (p.132)
	R	“I’m with the kids all day. Anyways, so the thing was to play ball...” (p.132)
	M	“I wanted to play ball and I realized what I needed to do in order to get there...” (p.132)
	A	“Back to game day, I just love it because I’m doing what I love to do and I get to get paid for it.” (p.178)

Chart 5 - Cross-Case analysis with excerpts reflecting components of Flourishing and PERMA

From Chart 5 above, it would appear that there is substantial evidence that the athletes reported and described multiple experiences that would represent the key components of Flourishing through Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (Tables 10, 11, and 12 above).

These athletes are the elite athletes in the NFL today. These athletes are flourishing and this study uncovered the evidence of the elements of PERMA. The key components of Flourishing are **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**chievement. These athletes are flourishing in their lives and at the Point of Attack. These athletes bring with them the elements of PERMA to their team and teammates. This study shows through these three athletes now playing in the NFL that PERMA may have meaning.

Robert Frost (1920) writes in *The Road Not Taken* that two roads diverged in the woods, and taking the road less traveled made all the difference. Walter, Alan, and Stan all shared their desire to be different to leave a legacy. Many others expected them to be nothing in their life, yet they chose to go down the path less traveled. These players all experienced engagement, positive relationships, and meaning which gave them the desire to make a difference by being different and leaving a legacy their family could be proud of.

These players have experienced what Seligman describes as Flourishing in their lives. They did become non-productive member of society. They did not end up in jail. And they certainly did not end up dying in the streets. They did find themselves with a lot of positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and achievement in their lives, and they are now star players in the NFL.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite NFL football players on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. The study sought to understand what it is about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day. This study aimed to understand the lived psychosocial experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants or regular season starters in the NFL.

Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to explore evidence of these athletes at the Point of Attack, defining challenges and deliberate practice. The study also sought to identify evidence in the athletes' lived experiences that resembled the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Flourishing (PERMA) model. Team chemistry was also used as a lens to identify if team environment or team cohesion contributed to their success.

There was substantial evidence from the athletes' reports and multiple described experiences that would represent the key components of SDT, relatedness, competence, and autonomy. There were several instances that would represent the key components of Flourishing through the PERMA (**P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**chievement) model. Also,

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athletes reported and described multiple experiences that would represent the importance of team chemistry achieved through team cohesion and team environment.

But the primary focus of the study was what was happening in their psychosocial experience at the Point of Attack. And, what was found was profound, that their thinking at this moment was “it’s all about me right now, I play for the name on my back.” There is substantial evidence that the athletes reported and described multiple experiences that would represent the importance and existence of defining challenges, and deliberate preparations are for effective delivery at the Point of Attack. Quotes were reported from these athletes, which also reflected findings for each research question (Charts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

These players demonstrated excellent performance at the highest level. They have been recognized by their leaders and peers as elite in their respective positions in the NFL. Further analysis and discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This final chapter will include discussion, strengths, limitations, implications, and conclude with the overall summary found from the research results. The chapter will be organized using a format organized around the results of the four research questions, previous research and theory, methodological implications, future implications, applications, limitations, and summary (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived psychosocial experiences of elite National Football League (NFL) football players, on game day, during the most demanding and intense competitive situations. The study sought to understand what it is about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day. This study aimed to understand the lived psychosocial experiences of Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl participants or regular season starters in the NFL. These are the very best NFL players who have prepared for and competed at the highest level. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to explore evidence of these athletes at the Point of Attack (Wilkinson, 1993), defining challenges and deliberate practice.

The strength of narrative design is that it is human-centered and captures life stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry is

interested in exploring complexity from a human-centered perspective. Narrative is a good technique when looking for lessons from life experiences (Bold, 2011). Narrative has usefulness in exploratory study. By the participants just being able to tell their story, narrative design allows for the uncovering of unique aspects of their lived experience.

Three elite NFL professional football players participated in the study and provided the opportunity to be interviewed. The narratives collected from the three elite football players provided a rich and intimate personal story related to each of their lived experiences. These stories generated an enormous amount of information and detail. To best present their stories in relation to the research questions that have defined the study, a format was chosen that was organized around the elements of the four research questions, and the themes that emerged from the players' reported lived experiences. Direct excerpts from the athletes' narratives that reflected each research question was provided. It should be noted the discussion for the findings are for these three subjects and may not be generalizable to entire the entire NFL population.

The four research questions were as follows:

1. What do these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack as the football is snapped to begin a play that allows them to

perform at such a high level, consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success?

2. In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?

3. What in the players' lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?

4. Did team chemistry and environment play a role in their lived experience?

Related to the four research questions, results from this study showed the existence of substantial evidence of the components of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Intrinsic motivation as described by (Deci & Ryan, 1995). There was similar evidence of the players' experiencing many or all of the elements of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011a). And, each of the three athletes reported the importance of positive team environment and strong team cohesion as making important contributions to the success of their team. This supports the theories and is consistent with the work of Carron et al. (2002) related to team cohesion.

The literature would encourage us to draw the inference or implication that to try to have excellent team performance in football,

we should be providing lots of experiences building self-determination including autonomy and intrinsic motivation. We should also be having the athletes in an environment filled with the experiences of PERMA, and have the intentional emphasis for strong positive team environment with strong team cohesion. These elements would support outstanding play.

Thus, it is inferred in this study, these three football players are among the most outstanding players in the NFL. It is inferred there is a probability of all SDT, PERMA, and team cohesion existing in these athletes' experience. And, the research said, yes. They all showed evidences of Self-Determination, they all showed evidences of PERMA, and they all spoke to the importance of team environment and team cohesion. And yet, they all said, "It's all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back!"

Each of these three athletes shared similar experiences. In each of their cases, a decision was made to go in a positive direction, and not go down a path of destruction, leading to a place where many of their friends and family members had been and gone. Football became more for them than just winning a game. And even today, they are the elite of the elites, and the best of the best. They have made plenty of money, and they have lots of material items. And yet, this is not what motivates them (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

These athletes' successes came from delivering their very best performances, at the Point of Attack. At that moment, they are playing for the names on their backs. This gives them meaning (Seligman, 2011b). These players believe the best way they can help their team is to be the best they can be on the field (Carron et al., 2002).

Research question 1 asked: What do these elite players think and do at the Point of Attack, as the football is snapped to begin a play; that allows them to perform at such a high level consistently? What were the defining challenges, and what were the specific deliberate preparations that supported their success? Facing some adversity early in the lives of these three athletes served as some form of motivation to excel. Wanting more and wanting to do better was a driving force to pursue the sport of football as a vehicle to do something positive and constructive with their lives. Professional football was the means to an end where these players could provide for their family in more ways than just financially. These players also play for pride in their family's name.

"I play for the name on my back!"

At the Point of Attack, these players have delivered their best, and their best is better than most. These three athletes are the elite of the elite. They are flourishing in their lives, which in turn, they are flourishing on the football field. It is found throughout their narratives,

Alan, Walter, and Stan shared numerous experiences of overcoming adversity. All three athletes experienced tough socio-economic struggles and adversity in their family. They each developed a tenacious work ethic and became good leaders. All three of these athletes had a strong desire to leave a legacy and elevate the status of their family name. All three of these athletes say, in their own version, "I play for the name on my back!"

Walter grew up in a tough socio-economic family situation. He spent a year in a Juvenile Detention Center where he made the decision that to make something out of his life and be successful. He felt like his back was up against the wall. This adversity created a situation where he used autonomy and self-determination to change the trajectory of his future. Walter decided to pursue football and work hard to be the best he could be. This led to attending college on a full scholarship and being drafted in the NFL.

In the NFL, Walter has had great success. He was selected to the NFL Pro Bowl in Hawaii. He states that he plays for something bigger than football. He wants his name to mean a lot and he works hard for it. He wants his name to be mentioned with the elite class. He says, "...my name means more than that. I named my son after me for a reason, because, you know, when I'm gone, and he will have to carry

on I want my name to mean something." Walter plays for the name on his back.

Alan grew up in a tough socio-economic family situation as well. Most of his friends were older, and many times, he was not the most talented of the group. He had strong desire to be recognized in the same light as those who were more talented in his neighborhood. He decided to start playing football again in high school, after many not playing, and earned a scholarship to play in college. While he was in high school and college, he suffered severe leg injuries. These injuries served as adversity, and this made Alan very determined to get healthy and become stronger. He eventually would be drafted in the first-round to the NFL.

In the NFL, Alan has had an enormous amount of early success. He enjoys the strategic aspect to the game and competing against the best. He truly measures himself against the best because he wants to be the best. However, he plays for something bigger than football. He says he plays for the name on his back. He says, "I think, first off, your name means a lot, so every decision you make you gotta be responsible with it." Alan tries to do things that will keep him remembered because he wants to leave a legacy. Having a son motivates him to be successful, because he wants his son to be proud of his name.

Stan grew up in family where his last name was synonymous with being a great athlete. Everyone in his family was very good athletes and he felt the need to restore the legacy of his family name. His older brothers had made mistakes and did not live up to the family name so he felt the need to take it upon himself to bring pride back to his family. Stan knew he wanted to attend college on a full scholarship to play football, so he worked diligently. His ultimate goal was to be a first round draft pick in the NFL.

Despite many doubters, Stan was drafted in the first-round in the NFL. He has flourished in the NFL as a starter and has even been voted a captain by his teammates. Game day is special to Stan. He loves his teammates and coaches but something he says makes him emotional on game day is, "every time I walk in that locker room, when I see my name on my jersey like I said, on game day, it's like, 'Dang' I can't believe everything, just it goes full circle. I just think about everything like what I could be doing, where I could be at." Stan reflects on game day when he sees his jersey in his locker and thinks about what he would be doing had he not made the right decisions along the way. Stan's family legacy is important to him and he plays for the name on his back.

For each of these athletes, playing for the name on the back of their jersey is the beginning and the end. Making their name known

motivates them every day and it is what they want to leave behind. When they wake up in the morning they think about being the best they can be, and when they go to sleep, they are excited about the next day to work hard to make their name known. They all want more out of life and want to leave something behind for their family.

What was it that made them decide they wanted more out of their lives? Why did they want to be different than their friends? Why did they want to graduate from college? Why did they choose to work harder than others around them? Why did they choose to take autonomy with their lives and go in a direction toward "Elite"? Research questions 2, 3, and 4 provide some insight with evidence that may explain some of the reasons why these players chose to be ready to succeed at the Point of Attack, at the highest levels of NFL football. And the essence of what they chose is described by "I play for the name on my back. It's all about me!"

APPLICATION

There is certainly a potentially powerful and impacting application of the findings of this study. However, it is understood no conclusive results have been proven here. This was a qualitative exploratory study. Again, it should be noted the discussion for the findings are for these three subjects, and may not be generalizable to

entire the entire NFL population. There was no hypothesis. And, there are no such claims being made.

However, this study does contain the narratives from three elite professional NFL football players. These narratives provided powerful and compelling stories to stimulate discussion about what happened in their lives. These athletes experienced moments where autonomy and self-determination were driving them towards success. Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (Seligman, 2011a) were discovered in each of these three professional athletes' live stories. Each of these players expressed the importance of their family name. In their own words, they each stated that they each play for the names on their backs.

Ultimately, it is the long-term objective of this study to provide coaches and athletes better education leading to better game day performance and positive lived experience. Recommendations for aspiring college and professional NFL players, and coaches of these players, would suggest they should consider using these three players as role models. Role modeling, as described in Social Learning Theory, proposes that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people, and then attempting to be like them (Bandura & McClelland, 1977). The players in this study may be role models.

It has been noted that the importance of self should not be lost. The individual is important! Coaches should consider emphasizing something bigger than football. These three players say when they line up for a play, they have the mindset, "it's all about me right now!" and "my responsibility is to do what I do to the best of my ability to the best I can." These three athletes play for the names on their backs.

The primary focus of the study is what was happening in their psychosocial experience at the Point of Attack. And what was found was profound. Their thinking at this moment is "it's all about me right now" and, "I play for the name on my back".

As these three professional athletes may serve as role models to many young football players, all of this should be considered when developing educational messaging for football coaches at all levels. This study is not making any generalizations other than these three players might be good models to follow.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE

RESEARCH:

There is not much research on elite NFL players. This research study explored three elite NFL football players' reports and experiences as they lived them. They shared their understandings of how and why they were successful.

This research was conducted using the qualitative narrative design to be able to explore the intimate experiences of these elite athletes. Webster and Mertova conclude that, "The significance of narrative inquiry lies in its exploration of new ways of viewing and conducting research that address human performance in a variety of environments" (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Future researchers would be encouraged to apply a variety of other methodologies, to this same subject pool, elite NFL football players. It would be necessary to pull the emerging themes from qualitative studies into an instrument to conduct quantitative analysis such as a regression. Would these other methodologies confirm these findings related to the mindset of elite players of "I play for the name on my back!" and "It's all about me right now!"?

Future researchers also might be encouraged to explore other athlete populations and socio-economic status, as well as further exploration of the role and relationship of SDT, PERMA, and team cohesion with elite level performance in football.

STRENGTHS

Using a narrative method allowed for in-depth, thick and rich findings. The role of the researcher becomes one of a narrator. In order to get to depths of the origin of issues there needs to be an

opportunity. Using a narrative approach allows the researcher to capture the essence as the story unfolds. Wolcott (2009) writes, "How you first became involved in the topic, to how you proceeded and what you learned, might be an appropriate vehicle for narrating your account?" The researcher must maintain focus on the research and not him or herself. Indeed, telling stories is neither a choice nor an obligation, since to live is to enact a story about the kind of person that each individual takes themselves to be (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). All of this was certainly true with this study.

LIMITATIONS

When using qualitative research narrative design, generalizations cannot be made about a population. The access to "Elites" can be challenging, especially, when trying to conduct research. High profile elite athletes face an enormous amount of intense coverage by the media. As a result, for self-preservation, they have become very skilled at answering questions diplomatically. And often times giving the interviewer more of what the interviewer wants to hear rather than what the player is actually experiencing. The ability of the researcher to establish rapport with subjects such as elite professional athletes is a challenge within itself.

Narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty. But, it does allow someone from the outside, a better opportunity to see the story, and life, and behaviors of another. And that other is a potential great role model, the narrative design allows for better understanding of what it is we are modeling (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

These are limitations to narrative studies when interviewing elite athletes; however, in this study, rapport was established prior to each of these athletes becoming professional NFL football players. Trust and credibility was earned through a prior coach-athlete relationship. The participating athletes were very willing to share their story and were forthcoming with the intricate details of their lives during the interviews that generated over 9 hours and 150 pages of transcribed narrative. The researcher is thoroughly convinced that each of these three subjects told their stories.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

“I play for the name on my back.”

The statement “I play for the name on my back” sounds selfish to many leaders in sport. In football, it is often taught that players play for the name on the front of the jersey, not the back. What does this mean to these players? These players report they love their team

and their teammates. They also report they feel accountable to their teammates, and they want their teammates to be accountable to them. These three players are all about their team. These player's say when they line up for a play, they have the mindset, and "it's all about me right now! This is the moment. I have to do my job. And that is on me because no one is going to do it for me. I have to deliver the best I have right now."

There is a saying that goes "The strength of the wolf is in the pack and the strength of the pack is in the wolf." Wolves have been around for millennia and have strong survival instincts and are said to be the mammals that embrace family the closest to humans. They live for each other, yet each of them has a specific special role with the pack. The pack supports each wolf and each wolf supports the pack. There is not a strong pack without strong wolves that have been trained by the pack (Mech, 2000).

Similar to wolves, this is how a good football team can become a great football team. And that's not selfish. This is each player working every day to be the best he can be, so when game day comes, each athlete is prepared and ready. This is what makes for a great player on a great team. Yet, leaders in the sport talk about, there is no "I" in "Team". "Big Team – Little Me" and "Team over me", yet, these

players say no. They say, "I play for the name on my back, and that is how I do the best for my team."

Because people said to them they would never make it and their last name would never mean anything, the players in this study absolutely play for name on their back. When people see them play, they see the names on their backs. These players want their family and children to be proud. They want to leave a legacy. They are saying that when they line up, it is all about them. These players' names mean something to them.

When these players leave the huddle to line up, they bring with them all of their preparation, motivation, and determination to be great. All of these players appreciate "team." Conventional teaching and coaching has made an emphasis that players are to sacrifice themselves for the good of the team. This paradigm never gets questioned because at its core, it is a very simple way of thinking. The system itself promotes a belief that this thought process is not to be questioned. And, since the system never gets questioned, it perpetuates the thought that it must be right.

These three players are playing for something bigger than football. They have a sense of urgency on the football field. They have more to lose than the game they are playing; so they do everything in their power to not lose it. These players have translated what has

happened in their lives to their approach to the game of football. They had an intersection with an experience during which they made the conscious decision not to be a failure. They did not go to the best schools or come from a high or moderate socio-economic background.

In fact it was quite the opposite. These circumstances challenged and allowed them to make a determined decision that they would make something worthwhile of their lives. They all had friends or relatives that made decisions that caused them to experience failure.

These three players say they play for the name on the back of their jerseys. This is their family's name. These players have all experienced people in their lives who doubted their ability to be successful. Many of their friends and family members were told the same. At some point, these players made the decision they would be different.

What is different about these three athletes? They want their name to mean something. They want to be significant. They want their sons and daughters to be proud of their name. They want their parents to be proud of their name. They want to leave a legacy where everyone knows their name. There is no one that can convince them otherwise. This is a prime source of motivation. They all want to be great! They want to be great for their family. They play for the name on their back. And all of this is a reflection of what Deci and Ryan were

identifying in SDT. This is the essence of autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Pride in self, shown by the delivery of the best a person has, and giving it for the team, is what makes for great teams. Not lack of pride. Having pride in one's self is not selfish. At the Point of Attack, these players have high belief in themselves and their abilities. When a defensive end lines up and its third and long, he knows that getting to the quarterback, before the quarterback has a chance to throw the football, is what his team needs from him at the Point of Attack. That defensive end has to have the mindset, "this play is all about me right now!" That is not selfish and the elite football players in the NFL. These players say they think that way.

These three players say they play for the name on their back. They are accountable. Coaches who say, "*Why would you do something to hurt the team? It is not about you!*" contradict themselves. "*It's not about you*" equals no accountability. "*It's all about you*" equals accountability. Coaches and leaders in sport want accountability. And, these players, say they want to be accountable. To be accountable, these players say, "*It's all about me right now!*"

Here is what this study has uncovered, from the narratives, of these three Elite NFL football players. These players love their team. They want to be on a team where the players are respectful of each

other and play for each other. They absolutely want to be accountable and want their teammates to be accountable likewise. They perceive the way to be the best teammate you can be, is to give the best you have every single play. "It is all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back". There may not be an "I" in "Team", but there surely is an "I" in "WIN". And the "I" in "WIN" stands for the importance of every individual on the team.

"If it is to be, it is up to me!"

"I play for the name on my back!"

APPENDIX: A

This study sought to understand what was it about these elite NFL players, beyond their physical talents and technical skills that allowed them to deliver superior performance on game day? There was no evidence in the literature that suggested research has been conducted to analyze this aspect of elite level NFL football players.

PRO BOWL

The Pro Bowl game is played in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Pro Bowl is the All-Star game of the NFL. This game matches up the American Football Conference (AFC) with the National Football Conference (NFC). This game is played one week after the conference championship games and one week before the Super Bowl. With a 53-man roster, 1,696 players make the opening day roster in the NFL each season. There are 704 opening day roster starting positions, excluding specialists. Only 106 players, including specialists, get selected to play in the Pro Bowl. Currently, players are voted into the Pro Bowl by the fans, coaches, and the players themselves. Each group's ballots count for one third of the votes.

SUPER BOWL

The Super Bowl is the annual championship game of the NFL. This is the highest level of professional American football in the United States. The NFL season begins in the late summer of the previous calendar year ending with Super Bowl that defines the overall champion. "If asked to name the quintessential expression of American culture most observers would name the Super Bowl" (Cole, 2010).

STARTER

There are 32 teams with only 22 starting positions available on each team. There are a total of 704 opening day roster positions in the NFL. Making an opening day roster as a starter is very significant. This indicates that these players are best on their respective teams.

SELF – DETERMINATION THEORY

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) theorizes when people take control of the things they can control in their own lived experience, they have enhanced motivation and effectiveness. For this control to happen, SDT further suggests that when the lived experience includes relatedness, competence, and personal engagement, coupled with

autonomous decision making, intrinsic motivation is predominant, leading to enhanced personal effectiveness.

In what ways did the players show self-determination and intrinsic motivation? Did they show experiences with autonomy?

Alan

College

Alan broke his leg during the third game of the season. This happened four weeks before the biggest game of the season, a game which Alan was determined to play. He used positive self-talk while he was rehabbing his leg. Alan did not allow negative thoughts stay in his mind while he was going through the rehabilitation process. He was motivated by the "big game" which is a characteristic of people with mental toughness.

Interviewer: You're a pretty good football player. What adversity did you face? Did you face any adversity, and, if so, what, and, describe it and how it affects you?

Alan: "From the beginning I've played football or when?"

Interviewer: Just go back.

Alan: "It was a game, like, I couldn't, no matter what, no matter what, I was gonna play that game. Like, before I know, before I broke man, when we play this game we gonna win this game. I'm gonna do everything in my power, we gonna."

Alan broke his leg in a game early in the season, and was determined to rehabilitate his leg, and get back before the biggest game of the season.

Alan: "And, I'm in here, I'm rehabbing; I'm trying to like, think in my head. When I broke my leg, it was like, broke. It wasn't like a crack. It was like, broke, and, I'm like, damn man, can I? (Laugh) If, it was like a little break, I can see, like. I think the game was like, in 4 weeks, I wanna say 4 weeks, and I was like (tapping on the table) 'I'll play this game, but I don't know how can I play this game'. So, I got a bone stimulator on my leg and trying to do everything. I'm drinking milk, I'm taking calcium pills. I'm doing all kinds of stuff. I'm trying to help me out."

Alan was rehabilitating his leg and doing everything he could to be ready to play in the biggest game of the season. He was unsure how he was going to be able to do it, but, he was determined to do so.

Professional

Interviewer: That's interesting. You said something about how you approach each day earlier. Does that tie into the way you approach practice?

Alan: "Yea, like, yea, once again it's like, it's not practice to me. So, when I go out, and have that practice, or, have that, whatever, I'm not gonna be embarrassed. I'm not gonna go out here and let you think cause it's a practice, that you're gonna win by any chance, or be like, beat me in something. I mean, I don't know. It's like, it's really just that mentality of I wanna, I wanna come out here and even if I'm not really feeling like it. I'll get better some way, you know, hell, if I'm, if I'm... It can be something small as me stretching. If I'll stretch today, I'll stretch good. I might not feel like being out here. I'm at least gonna get a good stretch in. I'll do something today that gets me better. I'm not gonna go out here

and not do it. You know? I'm not gonna go out there and do it half-assed cause that's just not even, in my, that doesn't even make sense to me. So, if anything, cause people are human. Like, nobody is gonna go out here and every day... You can do, you can choose what you wanna do, but like don't do it half-assed. I think a lot of people do stuff and they feel like not practicing, so they're gonna go half-assed today. Like, NO, like, no you can, you don't have to. That's not how it works, that's not how it works!"

Alan practices with a deliberate purpose to dominate. He is intrinsically motivated to work hard to be the best player he can be. Alan's competitive mindset will not allow anyone to think they can ever get the best of him, even if it is just practice. He will not allow himself to think of practice as practice.

Interviewer: Physically, mentally, and it's just and being present?

*Alan: "(both laugh) See, all that, like in my brain, I don't think about it like that. I think about it like, bring it. You know, like, if the game was to start at 9 o'clock. Okay, well, I'll wake up sometime, so, you know. It's not like, uh oh, the game is at 4:30, so I need to prep at one o'clock for this game cause I gotta go out there in a couple hours. I don't have to talk; I don't talk like that. I don't think like, 'sh*t' like I better drink a bunch of stuff today. I better eat; I better do this or do that. No, I don't, I can go out there on an empty stomach and beat your ass. (Laugh) Like, seriously, I don't think, like, I don't need, I don't need prep this, this, this. I need these obstacles; I need this; I need to think about..."*

Alan will not let himself think about game day superstitiously. He realizes the only thing that matters is how he performs on game day,

and will not allow him to make excuses for less than optimal performance.

Alan: "And, so, I think I carry it all in to my thing like at any given time I can play the game. I can play the game. I don't have to pump. I don't have to. I don't have to do all these things to get me ready for this. I'm ready to go. (Laugh) I'm ready to go!"

Alan is always ready to play the game. He will not let anything get in his way of delivering his best. Perhaps as a result of his strong work ethic and commitment to deliberate practice, when game time comes, Alan believes he is always ready to play.

Stan

High School

Stan: "I kind of played them off, like I didn't enjoy it, I kind of just, because, I didn't want them to make a decision for me. That's one thing that they did, they kind of just sit back and let me, let me do my own thing."

Stan took an official visit to Mid-Western University and had very good time. Afterwards, he did not want his family influencing his decision, so he suppressed his emotions. Already a highly skilled athlete, Stan describes his parent's support of his autonomy, thus, appearing to have the three basic needs of self-determination theory met.

Stan: "So I called coach E – I said 'Coach I want to be a Bengal'. So, I got down with Mid-Western University. And, when I came here, man, 'I can't do like my brothers did', you know. I don't want to go home. I

don't want mom to worry about me. I don't want dad to have to worry about me."

Stan had a very good relationship with Coach E and decided to attend Mid-Western University. He made a decision prior to arriving at campus that he would not make the same mistakes as his older brothers which would cause his parents more heartache.

College

Stan: "Topic of health professions. Trying to find us help, you know? Find what we want to do. So then, I figured out, okay, I wanted to be in the business school but I was like, man, alright man, that ain't really me. I can find another way to own a business and can learn different things along the way in order to help myself become successful in whatever I want to do. If I use this football, you know, I have a great opportunity. So, I might as well take advantage of it. Did, did enough in school. Man, you know, it is what it is, it's, college. Man, that business school, I'm cool on that, so, didn't pick a major and I didn't let them stick me in those Ag courses either. So, I took the first semester, took a couple Ag courses. Man, I'm good on this. So more so, me being like about the arts and science, I use to hang out over there a little bit more and the classes that I took there, I thought they were cool. So, I ended up doing interdisciplinary studies with a main focus being communications. Because, I was like, man, you know what? I might get a chance to be on TV one day, use this football thing. You know, you know what? I got to be able to communicate; got to be able to, you know, express myself. And, I think a lot of people take a liking to my personality and, you know, my demeanor, and I just try to use that to my advantage. Ended up, picking that major, and really, just killing time."

Stan chose to major in communications in college with the idea that he would be able to use it one day when he was finished with his playing career. Consistent with his tendency to set long-term goals for himself, Stan chose a major he believed would contribute to his goal achievement later in life.

Professional

As Stan previously described himself as one “who doesn’t just go with the crowd,” his reporting that just being yourself is the best advice he has ever received, further illustrates his perceived importance of autonomy. Elaborating on what he believes has contributed to his success, Stan reports,

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: “Just working hard, just grinding, straight grinding. Like, like no partying, right there by LA. Like no, I’m good, everybody, we’re going to LA. I’m chillin’, I’m chill, I’m good, I’m grinding, trying to get right. Ended up, getting right, shoot, some pretty good workouts, pretty good interviews.”

Stan trained for the NFL Combine in Los Angeles, California. He was very dedicated and focused with training and preparation. Stan expresses his demonstrated work ethic as “just grinding.”

Stan: “I understood what it was. You know, that’s one thing about me. Like I said, it’s good, it’s bad. I can turn it on at any time. Like, I can just, like, when it’s time to do this, I got to do this. That’s what I’m about.”

Stan attended the NFL Combine and had the perspective that it was show time. Confident in his work ethic and preparations, he believes he can turn his performance and personality on and off on command.

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "I mean, they did some good things, but they didn't reach the plateau that they wanted to reach. You know, as far as Athletics goes. Now, I know Athletics isn't everything. And Athletics doesn't define me, but I think it does define success right now, for me, because, that's what I do. That's how I make my living, is basically through this. So I had a chance, good thing I'm the baby, cause I probably wouldn't be here, if I, probably. I just watched my big brother (Bro), he's my idol, play linebacker as well, went to small South University which is right up the street from home. He should have probably left the state. Other places wanted him. He decided to go with his best friend. Him and his best friend, they both went to South University. He played as a true freshman and got a taste of that, you know; the lime light. Actually, Jerry was the All-American linebacker there at the time, and my brother came in and started beside him as a true freshman. So, he ended up breaking his toe, in like the second or third game and, it all went downhill from there. Basically, he was chasing girls, you already know how that is. Bro went to college, and Bro is ten years older than me. So, I'm twenty five, he's thirty five. He didn't have his priorities straight, because he liked the women. And, I guess he didn't have anybody to watch to help him get to where he wanted to go."

Stan had an older brother go to college to play football and made choices that Stan was able to learn from.

Stan: "So, Bro went to South University, got in to some stuff and started missing class. Just doing all the

things that get you sent back to home in Texas. You know how that is in a small town. That means a lot. Like, come back, and home, so seeing Bro come back home and going back to work at the lumber yard out there. That's, you know, one thing about it, one thing about the Woods, that's what they call East Texas. They, they got a lot of trees out there, so, you know, the timber business, if you in to that, you know, you might make yourself some pretty good change. So Bro got into that and started working and I was like, man, I don't wanna come home. I can't say he embarrassed my family's name you know, but I mean he didn't live up to what he was supposed to when he went to South. He was back home, what was it, second semester, or, I wanna say first semester, he was supposed to be a sophomore, he was back home. After spring ball and everything, he didn't go back and he came back home. And that was that was tough, you know, being a kid that looked up to him, and I was like 'dang man I can't believe this', but Bro, he got a second chance, and he ended up getting back in school and playing ball again, but, it was at a smaller school where it wasn't a big deal, you know. He did well, but he was burnt out, he was burnt out. He had a tough, tough little transition. You know, leaving number 1 program, being at home, working, living at mom and dad's place. It was a little different for him. So, you know, then my middle brother who's four years older than me; and he saw big bro too. I don't know why he didn't take heed. I mean it was right there for him to see. I saw it and I was just a kid. So, my middle brother he went to Bluff Junior College. He got a scholarship. His grades weren't right. So, actually, Coach P. was at Toalson and they were recruiting him, it's weird. He's getting, like, you know, letters and stuff from schools, like Toalson, and a lot of Middle conference schools and stuff. He was, he was getting some looks, he was getting some looks, but his grades wasn't right, so, you know, ain't nobody really mess with him too much. So, he went to Bluff and played under, I think, Don French's son was the, he was pumping them out of Bluff Texas to a big school in

Texas. That's kind of how they were doing it. His son was the coach there at Bluff. So, Bro went there, and he went with a couple of buddies from college, I mean from high school as well. And, you know not necessarily his closest friends or anything, but, they just all went that JuCo route. They just jumped in right at the last second and the all went to the same junior college. And, he went there he didn't have his sh*t together, either."

Stan: "Bro went to Bluff which is in Bluff, Texas right up the street from the house too not too far, may be two hours, which is not far from a big city in Texas. (Clear throat) Sorry. So Bro went out there and he..."

Stan: "It wasn't about that to me. Bro he was kind of like a follower, like. He was a cool kid. But, you know what I'm saying, he wanted to hang out with the cool; you know what I'm saying he wanted to kind of be. I was like, 'Brah'; you really don't have to do this. You can just be yourself. That's, I mean, that's the best advise that anybody can give someone is just be yourself. Bro went to school and got in to ball out, balled out. I mean, he was killing it. He played wide-out. He was nasty with it. Brah is four years older than me. He was getting it in. We use to go; we use to drive up to Bluff. That's when I was a bit older; I went to high school the year that he left. He graduated '02, and that's the year that I came to high school. The next year, so, I was in 8th grade when he graduated. So, he went to Bluff then he balled out. His grades, they slipped, I mean, not he's bad in the classroom he got into some sh*t with some books. They stole somebody's books, you know they in JuCo; you know how it is its rough. They stole somebody's books. I mean, you're not far from home. Mom work, Dad work; all they do to support us. And, you know, he ain't got to ask for much. You know mom do whatever she can. You know how moms are, dad going to do whatever he can. So, Bro got in to some sh*t with some books. They, they drove up to the big city and turned the books in at the other Junior College, the same Junior College in another city. So, they turned the books

and ended up getting money for them. And, so it came back that somebody's book were missing and they track all that stuff. So Bro ended up losing his little scholarship at Bluff. And, he ended up coming back home."

Stan's two older brothers made decisions that resulted in losing their athletic scholarships and he learned from it.

Stan: "Big Sis, she's like my second mom. She's 15 years older than me; they think I'm her child anyway. See mom, mom was 36 when she had me. Have babies when you're 36, you know. So mom had me. Mom had me at like, 36, and she always called me special baby, because, I don't think they was trying to have me. And then right before me, she had a miscarriage, back when she was, like about, 32, 33. So, I don't think they were trying anymore. I don't think they... so, I ended up coming. So my sister, just from a child on up, she's just always looked out for me, loved me. Like, I was on a college campus and stuff like as like a six year old kid, cause, she went to an all-black school. Which my mom graduated from, and mom went there, and played ball, as well. You know, so, my sister always just kept me around her, but you couldn't tell, cause I'm not a feminine guy at all (laugh). I love to hang out with my sister. I go back to the big city and we just kick it – like Sis, I'm flying in. She come get me, we hang out. She has two daughters. Her youngest is 9. She's a third grader. So we hang out all of the time, we just have a good time. But um, so sis, she, she looked out for me as a kid, and, you know, growing up she'd always try to keep me on the right path, too. Like, if I stepped out of line, she was going to get me back in. But, she didn't have the same effect on my other brothers, because you know what I mean they were closer in age. You know how that is. It's a little different; She's the, she's the oldest one. So, Okay, I don't know how I got off on sis – but I love sis – but I think she played a big part, because, you know, I just want to do

something for my family, because, I mean, we didn't have much."

Stan was very close with his older sister. When his family was displaced by Hurricane Rita he stayed with her and she cared for him as though she was his mother.

Stan: "My Mom's a school teacher; Dad worked at the local auto sports – what's it called – auto store – mechanic store, so, Pop worked up there, Mom worked up at the school house and anyways. When we left, we left back to that football side of things."

Stan's parents worked to support the family. When the hurricane hit their town, it took a toll on how they were able to financially support the family.

Stan: "But, Coach E, he always found a way to find me, and check on us, and always try to figure out, you know, what was going on with us. How we were? Even when we were at Mid-Western University he knew more about what stuff was happening at home than I did – it's weird. And so, got a chance to get offered by Mid-Western University, came up on a visit up in December, back in, um, '05, yep, I was 17. Came up here; you guys were getting ready for the bowl. Down there fighting and stuff all in the indoor. That's a great story. So, we down there chillin' in the indoor, and I'm like, man, I kinda like this place. It was cool and then everybody was showing us all. You know, this was, virtual, then everything that we see now, it's virtual. You know, it gave me a vision of what Mid-Western University was trying to do. So, I'm like, it seems kinda cool. Parents really liked it. They enjoyed the visit. I enjoyed the visit."

Stan formed a very good relationship during recruiting with one of his college coaches. Coach E found a way to maintain contact with Stan during the time his family was displaced by Hurricane Rita.

Stan: "But, after we left the visit, they were so excited about Mid-Western U. So, went back home and then how that happened. I'm in like a sporting goods store. I think KU and U of H were playing a bowl game. U of H beat the crap out of KU. No KU beat the crap out of U of H. And I, I, I had a soft verbal commit to U of H because, when I was in the big city, during the hurricane, my cousin played tackle there, and I would hang out with him all the time on campus. So, I be in the locker room, and stuff, chillin'. Coach B. was there, so I ended up committing, it was real soft though, I don't think, nobody, ever... So, I came up to Mid-Western University, enjoyed that. I went back to that sporting store I was in the sporting goods store in Barry, TX, about 50 miles south of J-Town. I saw an "M" sweatshirt, kind of weird, and um, I was like 'dang, I was just left there'. What is this? It was Steve and Barricks little sporting goods store, hoodies and stuff. It was the only one in the whole store. Wasn't my size though, but, it just seemed like; like 'dang, it might mean something'. So it was kind of like an omen or something."

After Stan left his official visit at Mid-Western University, he saw a Mid-Western University sweatshirt and took it as a symbol the he should go there to play football.

College

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "We were all cool, like, it's kind of like my group with Kay, Damon, and Jackson, and, you know how we are. It was a lot like that in high school. And, then you know then people start changing. You know you

growing up, things start change. People get in to different things."

Stan had a group of friends in college that reminded him of his friends from high school. Except, his friends from college remained close, unlike his friends from high school.

Stan: "So, I mean, it, it kind of made sense to go back to school, I was only a semester away from graduating which would just make my mom's, my mom's world, you know, going back to school and graduating."

Stan chose to return to college for his senior season and graduate from college which made his mother really proud.

Stan: "Cause they have enough to worry about, with just their marriage, was on the rocks when I came to college. So, came here, really enjoyed it, man. Like, I mean, you guys did a really good job of keeping us right."

Stan chose to make good decisions while in college knowing that any stress caused by him to his parents would create additional problems in their already struggling relationship.

Stan: "Kind of taking that transition course, class, transition course class, with what's his name, Dr. Christmas."

Stan: "So, um, then there's the girl. So man, Man, met her at Athena, one night, I think some guy was harassing her. So she, she had a few, she likes to drink. I like to drink too, which is kind of not good, cause my dad was an alcoholic as well. It's kind of hereditary. I have a filter, so I'm good, like I said, 'I walk that line, when it's time to get right; it's time to get right'. And, I know that, and I'm glad that I'm able to do that, cause everybody ain't can't handle. So, met the girl, she's awesome, awesome like. So, like so about me and I put her like through so much

hell. But, you know me, I'm just like I'm just young, being here at Mid-Western University. You see it like last night, like if I'm here about myself, it be hard, it be hard, it was ridiculous and they thirsty. So um, met the girl, been rocking since '08; Spring ball '08. We made that official. She wouldn't let me didn't let me get it for free for too long. She put the law out on me. So, I've been getting right here lately. Trying to do the right thing, it's going well. She's out today, looking at some rings, it's, you know, in preliminaries, but I mean, I definitely know she's the one for me. And, I know we're a good team, so that's awesome, so and the whole time, she was all about my plan too, I mean. Not even about, you know how it is, what I mean; you play ball, yada, yada, yada. When we disagree, she was like, 'Oh you so cool, you play football', like she, she hates the fact that I play ball, actually, but. She supports me, so she supports my dream, so. She actually put her life on hold; you know, come out and support me. We have a dog that's basically like our son, right now; he's a sickly child too, man. He's an English bulldog and he's allergic to everything. Everything that can go wrong with a bulldog, with a dog in general, we've already gone through it or going through it right now. So um, you know, she's perfect awesome great with my family. Her family's awesome. They're from KC, so, I do get to come with them every now and then, which is pretty cool. Life is pretty good right now. Life is good right now."

Stan talks about drinking alcohol and being responsible. He also talks about his fiancé who he met in college and how their relationship important is to him.

Stan: "College, college, helped me so much cause the guys I was with in high school they were like, you know, they got in to the wrong things. But, the guys that I met here seemed to all be like me, in the fact that, they were ambitious; they didn't come from much. Kelvin, you know Kelvin, Kelvin's a little different. He's family educated. Dad is like, what, vice, vice-

president of a bank. Mom's a teacher, like my mom, professor. Um, it's little different but everybody else didn't come from, you know, the greatest situation. So, met those guys, and I think the fact that Kelvin didn't come from that, you know, it says, it made him, he had a perfect career, he just got better and better each day. I think that because he was in the house with me, Dan, Jackson, just got other guys, who, who just, we so competitive and we all just wanted to, you know, that was our dream was to make it. I don't think that was his dream. I don't think his dream was to make it. you know, it wasn't about football. When he got here, I don't think he cared about that. You know, but being with us that's what helped him get to that. But, you know, that helped me too, cause those guys kept driving me, kept driving me. And, now that I'm in the league just to see how far that I've come. So, every time I walk in that locker room, when I see my name on my jersey like I said, on game day. It's like, 'Dang, can't believe everything', just it goes full circle. I just think about everything like what I could be doing, where I could be at."

Stan talks about how proud he is of one of his college teammates who was also his roommate. He talks about how he was able to help motivate this friend to be the best he could be.

Professional

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "So, going to the combine, you couldn't have told them, you ask them did I enjoy the process, 'Oh he looked like he enjoyed every minute of it'."

Stan attended the NFL Combine and chose to have a positive attitude and enjoy the process.

Stan: "Actually, getting ready to go back to Cali for a job. Him, and Mom, might be rekindling this flame, and

I'm kind of like the match maker, a little bit. It's kind of cool."

Stan talks about the success his dad is having in his personal life and how his parents may be working on re-establishing their relationship.

Stan: "And I, I haven't received a lot of accolades, and stuff like that, but I get respect that I deserve from my peers, and that's everything. It ain't about, it ain't about Pro Bowls; it ain't about these lists. Forget a list. It's about respect and how I go about my business out there. You know. It speaks because, when I go, when I go to places. The NFL's a small fraternity. When we're in other towns, and stuff like the Super Bowl, everybody in the same hotel and stuff, we all kicking' it and, Dude, was like Foster, he's like, how long you been in the league, I said, this my third, he said, 'Boy, you a vet'. He's like, you know. I'm like, 'that's real'. Like Kelvin, he's standing right there, he's like. That's what up. That's what's up! We're still growing, this just the first few chapters. You know there's gonna be some great things to come from my group of friends, and the group of guys I played with, here at Mid-Western University, that are doing a lot of good things. It's not just all about ballers, guys doing others things, other things that are successful as well. And um, But being out there, on the field on game day, like I'm just like a kid out there. I loving out there, laughing, having a good time. To be playing with Moe, chh, come on. It don't get no better. I'm playing with my college boy, my boy, my big bro, you know. He was the one, Moe was the one guy that when you went back from your visit, you'd be, like, 'they got this one guy named Moe'. Watch out man, cause Coach E use to talk about him, um, he'd be like just watch this kid. Yeah, watch this kid. So, I was kind of like, okay, So, I get here, he's kind of big, I'm like this dude, what does he play, defensive back? I'm like, put in corner. I think he started out corner here, right? Yeah, at first when he got here. I

*mean this dude's huge. I thought Moe was like a senior, and um its crazy like Kelvin said the same thing um, Dan said the same thing. We all, I don't think Mac was so much, I think cause Macs from STL, they probably linked up when he came here, and I bet, it was a little different cause he was like the one piece of that class that makes the class you know, so. That was a little different. I don't think he was around Moe like that, but anyways. Back to game day, I just love it because I'm doing what I love to do and I get to get paid for it. Which it ain't even about the check, it's about the respect like I said. So every time I step on that field I never take it for granted cause I know it can be (snapping his fingers) the windows that small so. I really enjoy, I really love doing what I do and I love to talk some sh*t on that field. I'll go out in pre-game; I'll go out in pregame. I usually come out keep the jersey up, like we used, you know how we used to, the jersey up. I'm out there like that, just chillin', vibing to the music. I'm usually um, trying to figure out what the playlist is, cause Pete, which is our veteran linebacker he um. He's pretty much running the sh*t. He ain't with, with us no more. I just got the corner locker, yeah, just got the corner locker – that's pretty cool. Gonna miss Pete, though, you know. We got the playlist jumping, it's the south, you know, we got a DJ at the game. It's real, it's real. So um, man, I just really enjoy being out there. Once that ball kicked off, it's crazy, I run on the field every time I take the field I never walk on the field. Right here... So, man, it's just so much fun out there, man, I hate when the game is over. Like, week 17, you've seen week 17."*

Stan talks about the importance of being respected by his teammates and peers. He takes a lot of pride in his work and every day he gets to play the game of football is a special day to him. Stan loves playing football, especially, with great players.

Stan:

*"We play for sh*t. We've already locked up what we needed to do. That was one of the most emotional games to me, we didn't know if we were going to play or not but, but, my job is to play. You know. That's what, that's what it's about. You go out there and you do what you gotta do. Sundays, my days, so I have some fun. I have a good time. That was an emotional game cause; I don't think everybody wants to play. (Gasp) I'm out there bustin' my ass, trying to trying to get it. And, you know, we fell short, but that was a tough lost for me, even though it didn't mean, it... That was tough for me, cause that was week 17, it's been a long year. I'm ready to get to the playoffs. I'm ready to show people, that we can do some sh*t, you know. You know how it is, you turn on the TV, they always. I remember we played Kansas City, um, week 1. Warren Sapp said Kansas City would beat us 41-14. Are you f*cking kidding me? I'm like, whoa, get out of here. We went up there and tore that, we ripped up that. We messed up their season, and, um, to be able to. The best thing about sports in general is to be able to, well, when you hear people say what you can't do and I've always been an underdog, for people to say you can't do this you can't do that. And then go out there and do it. And, you get a chance to look back at them. I don't even need to say, I'm not the type of dude to like. Even when I hear things, I'm not the type of dude to get on twitter and like go back and forth with people arguing about this arguing about that. I just I mean it's already been said, we just did it. You know, so, that's kind of how I am or I just did it if it's something that's in the reel. That's just how it is so you know that was an emotional time. You, at that game, that was, that was dope. I appreciate you being there. That was, that was cool. It was my birthday. I'm out there playing on my birthday, trying to get it, trying to win for my birthday. So, I can go out have a good little time, got the bye week coming up. You know, we were kickin' it a little bit. And um, that was cool, but game day, every time, it's the same when I come in that locker room, I just, my mind just starts spinning, I just sit there for a while (breathe) and soak it all in and then just go*

out there on that field and just and just kick it. That's what we do it out there, we kick it. Me and Moe, we laughing, we, we having fun, it's ridiculous. It's ridiculous!"

Stan is talking about the last game of the regular season. His professional team had already qualified for the playoffs, and in a sense, this was a meaningless game to some of his teammates. This was not the case with Stan. This game happened to be on his birthday and one of his college coaches were in attendance to watch him play.

FLOURISH AND PERMA

Flourish theorizes when people experience components of PERMA (Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) in their lives, they will be happier and flourish. The PERMA model states that people do not need to be fulfilled in all categories to Flourish (Seligman, 2011b). Seligman (2011b) suggests that each of these five components meet three critical properties in order to be included in the construct of well-being. These properties include: (1) it must contribute to well-being, (2) many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements, and (3) it is defined and measured independently of the other elements.

The first component of PERMA is positive emotion which includes joy, contentment, pleasure, and interest. Second, Seligman describes engagement as "flow". The third component, positive relationships,

serve as the foundation for well-being. According to Seligman the fourth component of well-being, meaning, refers to a sense of “belonging to and serving something perceived to be bigger than the self.” Lastly, achievement, especially in sport, is closely linked to the concept of intrinsic motivation (Seligman, 2011a).

What in the player’s lived experiences as an elite star in the NFL would be consistent with and reflect the concept of Flourish as identified in the PERMA model?

Stan

High School

Stan: “I mean, I think, I might have made like “A”, at the end when I took the ACT and was a 21 at the end. I took it a couple of times. My mom made me take it with my GPA, I didn’t have to make. You’d have to scale this, I don’t know if they do the scale now. The scale it goes with your GPA. The higher the GPA, the lower the tests score. My GPA was high so I didn’t really care too much about the test. I took the test a few times and figured out what I needed to do to get to college.”

Stan took the ACT a few times to get the score he needed. He received a lot of support from his mother to improve his score. PERMA elements: achievement.

Stan: “So, I ended up getting the grades straight, so, schools started coming in. My senior year, actually, my first offer was from U of H. U of H offered me my junior year, and I’m thinking, Like, man, I can’t believe I got an offer. It’s bigger than what my brothers did, they didn’t. My big bro had D1 offers but he chose to go D1AA. Which is weird? I was like,

man, I'm okay. I'm going the right way. Then my senior year, we had the hurricane hit J-Town; so, Hurricane Rita came. And just pretty much, we're not ground zero, but not like too much water around there. So, it wasn't as bad, you know, as the flood thing wasn't really big of a deal. But, it was really rough around there. During my senior year, we ended up leaving home for like 2 months; not being at home for about 2 months. The whole town was like running on generators for like almost two months; it was ridiculous."

Stan talks about how he improved his grades and the college scholarship offers started coming. The hurricane caused some confusion with schools that were recruiting him because his family had to relocate. PERMA elements: meaning and achievement.

Stan: "So, needless to say I was hanging out in the big city, during the storm, because, the storm had messed up everything at home. School was out. I was in the big city just hanging out at my sister's place."

Stan stayed with his older sister while his family was displaced because of Hurricane Rita. PERMA elements: positive relationships.

College

Interviewer: What made you successful?

Stan: "Really enjoyed that, so, when the time came, after my last college game. I had a chance to, you know, start sitting down with agents and stuff. Trying to figure out who I want to rock with what I want to do and hearing about where my name might fall in the draft. They were like, 'you kind of big, you gotta lose some weight'. So, I ended up losing some weight, lost about 15 pounds out in Cali right before the senior bowl."

Stan signed with an agent after his last college football game. He was instructed to lose some weight as he prepared for the NFL combine. PERMA element: achievement.

APPENDIX: B

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

INVESTIGATOR'S NAME: Pat Ivey

PROJECT # 1206561

STUDY TITLE: Exploring the Psycho-Emotional Factors Influencing Performance and Achievement in High Level Starters or Pro Bowl Participants in the National Football League.

INTRODUCTION

This consent may contain words that you may not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

This is a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to participate. As a study participant you have the right to know about the procedures that will be used in this research study so that you can make the decision whether or not to participate. The information presented here is simply an effort to make you better informed so that you may give or withhold your consent to participate in this research study.

Please take your time to make your decision and discuss it with your family and friends.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you were a starter/ Pro Bowler/ Super Bowl Participant from the 2012 National Football League (NFL) season.

In order to participate in this study, it will be necessary to give your written consent.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

Many athletes dreamed and prepared to make it to the NFL and become a successful player. Only a very few succeed in becoming a standout amongst their peers. For these athletes, their process of

preparation and performance delivery worked. We are interested in determining, what were the key factors beyond talent, and beyond physical/technical training; that impacted their achieving success and becoming one of the best at their craft?

I am seeking to understand the influence and impact of specific deliberate practice, preparations, focus, sense of self, core values and beliefs, motivation, commitment, and sense of autonomy on their NFL game day performance.

This research is being done with the intention to learn from these athletes, to develop better understandings, and ultimately to create appropriate educational materials to assist coaches and sport leaders in their efforts to teach, coach, develop and support future young athletes in their training and preparations in their pursuit performance excellence, and culminating in even more success.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

7 players that were starters, or selected to the Pro Bowl, or participated in the Super Bowl will be asked to join this study. Those who choose to participate will be scheduled for one on one interviews that will last 60 -90 minutes at their convenience. The environment for these interviews will take place in a quiet, comfortable and safe setting of their choice.

Interviews will be semi-structured, utilizing open-ended qualitative questions.

Interviews will last approximate 60-90 minutes, and will be both audio recorded. Additional interview sessions will be conducted as indicated.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

Your actual participation in the study will be limited to the 60-90 minute initial interview, with the possibility of 1-2 short follow up interviews as indicated as my analysis of the data unfolds. I expect to have all of the interviews completed by September 30, 2013.

You can stop participating at any time.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

I anticipate minimal, if any, risks or discomforts for the participants. I am asking the participants to share their preparations and perspectives regarding their experiences leading to and playing in the 2012 NFL regular season. By their very nature, these experiences with NFL preparation and competition were very intense, with extreme personal identification and investment. The information shared in the interviews will certainly be personal and potentially sensitive. Thus, there could be potential emotional risks in discussing their challenges and obstacles. But, these risks should be minimal. The interviewer will be a fellow athlete, with whom they are very comfortable. And, most of the participants are experienced in answering these types of questions in public or semi-public settings.

If at any time you are uncomfortable with a question, you are perfectly free to not answer it, or even withdraw from the interview and study.

I anticipate that the participants will enjoy recounting and sharing their NFL experiences, culminating in having success in the NFL.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefits to you. You may expect to benefit from taking part in this research to the extent that you are contributing to the education and preparation of coaches and athletes in the future. I hope and intend that the information learned from this study will benefit college athletes and their coaches in their quest for future success in the NFL. You are an elite NFL player and are exactly the role models of success for future athletes to follow.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

All data and digitally recorded materials will be held confidential by the research team. It will be stored in locked files in locked offices.

Beyond that, this study has a rather unique feature to it regarding confidentiality.

I acknowledge that, having been a starter/ Pro Bowler/ Super Bowl participant in 2012, all of the participants in the study are highly

prominent and recognizable individuals. To suggest that these participants' identities would be held confidential would not be realistic.

In fact, and in truth, these participants are potentially ideal role models for young athletes who are dreaming and working to become the NFL stars of the future. The intention of this study is to uncover and to refine important understandings from the experiences of these participating NFL players, and to facilitate the impact and influence of their role model for others.

To this end, each participant will have final approval of any aspect of their interviews that they wish to be included in the data that will be retained and analyzed, and to any identifiable information that could be shared in any research report or ensuing educational materials or publications.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and drop out of the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty to you the participant.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study, contact Pat Ivey at 573-356-5331.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

You may get further information regarding the study from the Principle Investigator, Pat Ivey at iveyp@missouri.edu.

SIGNATURE

I confirm that the purpose of the research, the study procedures, the possible risks and discomforts as well as potential benefits that I may experience have been explained to me. Alternatives to my participation in the study also have been discussed. I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

Participant _____

Date _____

APPENDIX: C

Dear _____,

I am writing to you as a professional football player in the National Football League (NFL) from the 2012 season to invite you to join me in a very exciting research project. I intend to explore your experiences and uncover understandings about what it is you do that make you an Elite player in the NFL. This information will serve as a guide to players, coaches, administration, and management to assist with better development of football players.

I am looking for participants for my research study. You are receiving this invitation because you were a starter from the 2012 season.

This study is exclusively about players who were starters, Pro Bowlers, and Super Bowl participants. For each of you, your process of preparation and performance delivery worked. I am interested in determining what were the key factors, beyond talent and physical/technical training that impacted your achieving success in the NFL?

This research is being done with the intention to learn from you, the players, to develop better understandings. Ultimately, the long-term objective is to create appropriate educational materials to assist football coaches and sport leaders in their efforts to teach, coach, develop and support future young athletes in their training and preparations in their pursuit performance excellence, and culminating in having success in the NFL.

If you choose to take part in this study, a 60 - 90 minute interviews will take place at your convenience. I will conduct the actual interviews with each of you. The environment for these interviews will take place in a quiet, comfortable and safe setting of your choice. Interviews will be semi-structured and consist of twelve questions. The interviews will be both audio recorded.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please contact me at:

- Pat Ivey: iveyp@missouri.edu or Cell # 573-356-5331.

Attached to this email is the informed consent document, which further explains the study. Thank you all for helping me out with this! Looking forward to hearing your personal story in your journey to success in the NFL!

Sincerely,

Pat Ivey

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VITA

Patrick Alton Ivey was born December 27, 1972 in Detroit, Michigan. After attending Cass Technical High School, he received the following degrees from the University of Missouri: B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Management (1996); and M.S. Health Education and Promotion with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction (2000); Ph.D. in Health Education and Promotion with an emphasis in Sport Psychology (2013). Ivey is married to Dr. Starla Green-Ivey from Hannibal, Missouri. Dr. Starla Ivey is an adjunct professor and teaches personal finance at the University of Missouri. They have two daughters, Paisli and Serena.

Patrick Ivey has taught Foundations of Sport Performance, a graduate-level course, at the University of Missouri. He has served as the Associate Athletic Director for Athletic Performance at the University of Missouri, overseeing both the Strength & Conditioning and Sports Nutrition departments, after serving as Assistant Athletic Director for Athletic Performance and Director of Strength and Conditioning.

During his tenure at Missouri, he has helped produce multiple first-round NFL draft picks, many All-Americans, conference players of the year, and numerous athletes who have gone on to play

professionally. He was also the director of strength and conditioning at the University of Tulsa from 2002 to 2004, where he directed the efforts of all 18 sport programs.

Ivey lettered as a defensive end for the Missouri football team from 1993 to 1995 and was named the strongest athlete in the program's history in 1995. He was signed by the San Diego Chargers after college and spent two seasons with the team. He also went on to play with the Detroit Lions, Denver Broncos, and Green Bay Packers.

In May 2012, Ivey was named Master Strength and Conditioning Coach by the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches association (CSCCa), the highest honor given in the strength and conditioning coaching profession. Ivey holds certifications from the National Strength and Conditioning Association, the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches association as well as United States Weightlifting.